

DESEGREGATING MONUMENT AVENUE

ARTHUR ASHE AND THE MANUFACTURING OF A NEW SOCIAL REALITY IN  
RICHMOND, VIRGINIA

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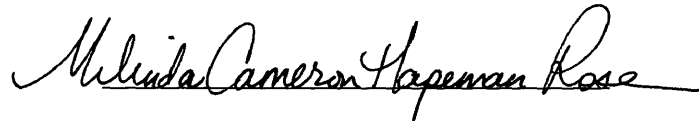
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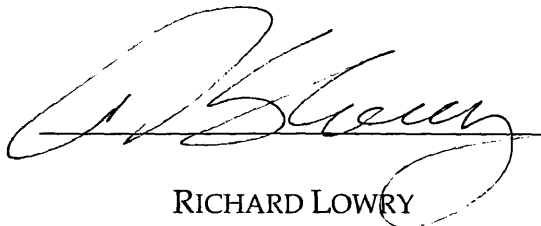
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RICHARD LOWRY

**DEDICATED IN LOVING MEMORY TO MY MOTHER, JANE ANNE H. HAPEMAN,**  
whose death ten years ago left an incredible void, but whose life today is an  
enormous inspiration. Her love of learning and her thirst for life are  
profound legacies, and I am grateful to have her as a model as I strive to  
engage fully in my own life. I am just now beginning to understand the  
depth and passion of her life, love, wisdom, and values, and I intend to  
continue discovering her as I work on me.

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As I thank Jonathan for introducing me to Richmond, I must also thank his parents, Connie and Ernie, for welcoming me here and for embracing me, and Mary for adventuring from upstate New York into Southern lands and Southern ways with me.

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of the following study is to evaluate the racial dynamics of Richmond, Virginia, in the late 1990s through an analysis of the debate surrounding the placement of a statue of black tennis star Arthur Ashe on Monument Avenue, a street previously dedicated solely to commemorating Confederate heroes.

The study draws upon the work of public historians and their discussions of monumentality to contextualize the history of Monument Avenue within larger commemorative patterns in the United States. It also draws upon Richmond history to understand how these larger national patterns of monument building manifested themselves on this specific landscape – the former capital of the Confederacy.

Within this framework, the study analyzes primary documents – specifically newspaper accounts from the city’s mainstream and African-American newspapers – as well as city council minutes and personal interviews to conclude that the Ashe controversy of 1996 reveals significant insight into the racial-political dynamics of Richmond.

Specifically, this paper identifies a tension between the state and city governments, whose idea it was to place the Ashe statue on Monument Avenue, and groups within the city’s population, which rejected the message of racial harmony that the Ashe statue was intended to portray.

The paper concludes that, while locating the Ashe statue on Monument Avenue has failed to achieve its original purpose, it has fostered an important and continuing dialogue about race, politics, and hegemony in Richmond, Virginia.

## **DESEGREGATING MONUMENT AVENUE**

## HINDSIGHT<sup>1</sup>

The monuments to the old heroes sink  
and sink. They cannot leave the airports  
or the parks, or the long avenues,  
because of their fountains  
and the brute weight of their horses.  
Too much time has gone  
into their high suspension, and they are  
filled, too, with the awed gaze  
of people passing, too many to count,  
more even than they watched fall  
on the low ground and be laid out, and tagged.  
The raised forelegs of their mounts  
are commas in the great pause of their longing.  
They look away over their cities  
at columns of figures which add up  
to the pitch of grief in a shoulder,  
the edge of rage in fingers that would ease  
the strict reins, the incipient twitch in a cheek.  
They would leave, if they could –  
cluck their tongues, lean slightly  
in the saddle and bid their horses  
turn – but where? We have given them  
little or no option but to keep  
their improper and reproving poise  
above us on their pediments, far enough  
to give them in bronze the same  
improvident distance from us  
they had in flesh and bone: rank.  
And so, absent all other choice,  
their weight bears downward  
imperceptibly, a second burial.  
One day they may be level with us,  
and later, in what is called the long run,  
our descendants can look down on them  
and wonder who we thought they were,  
what lives they gave us that we could  
hold them up so long in their departing.

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<sup>1</sup> Dabney Stuart, "Hindsight," Poetry Magazine volume CLXXIV, number 1 (1999): 12.

## INTRODUCTION: THESIS AND STRATEGY

The symbolic power of a street can be profound. New York City's dynamic, iconographical identity, for example, is inextricably tied to its streets, those that create neighborhoods and those that unite them. Each conveys certain universal messages that, when taken together, weave the fabric of a complicated place: Madison Avenue brings to mind luxury, Wall Street suggests images of shrewd business, Broadway connotes bright lights and fame, and Greenwich Avenue is shorthand for an entire Bohemian and beatnik cultural movement. New York has even demonstrated how the cultural messages of a street can change, over time, with the reinvention of the intersection of Broadway and 42<sup>nd</sup> Street—Times Square. This area of the city, which was once associated with flagrant bawdiness and pornography outposts, has been transformed into a feel-good family destination adorned with Disney murals.

New York City serves as just one example of how a city's streets can communicate certain messages. Streets have, in fact, developed as symbolic arteries in large cities and small towns throughout the world. While the scale of their significance varies from global to individual, streets are important because of the way they help define our selves and our cultures,

even from afar. The Champs Élysées in Paris, Beale Street in Memphis, the Unter den Linden in Berlin, Bourbon Street in New Orleans, Route 66, the street on which you grew up – the cultural values of these roadways far transcend their worth in pavement. In Richmond, Virginia, the street is Monument Avenue.

Monument Avenue is a boulevard-style road that extends westward from the heart of Richmond's affluent center. Its significance as a culture-shaper lies in the fact that this road has an actual commemorative function. Unlike New York's streets, which shape us in passing with neon lights, skyscrapers, and frenetic urbanites, Richmond's avenue contains a row of physical sculptures that deliberately convey a certain message. Collectively, the five statues of Confederate heroes serve as a shrine to a particular version of white southern history. The message is unmistakable: Richmond is a place so invested in its Confederate heritage that it dedicated its most beautiful boulevard to heroes of that cause. The lavish houses built around the statues punctuate the avenue's message by associating the "Lost Cause" with grandeur, as if to say these monuments and this history were not really lost at all; the monuments – in the form of both statues and houses – are proud reminders of the triumph of southern gentility and culture, despite the defeat of its government and systems.

While the commemorative logic that resulted in these statues assumed that all Richmonders would benefit from and be inspired by their presence, the wealthy white residents of Monument Avenue behaved as if the statues – and the lifestyle they represented – were theirs alone. The prominent construction of the roadway in the center of Richmond’s whitest and wealthiest area betrayed the fact that more than half of the city’s citizens were black. Thus, not surprisingly, while the Avenue was overtly embraced by Richmond’s white culture as a source of great city pride and as indicative of regional values, it became a divisive symbol to and among members of the African-American community. Though some blacks actively protested the Avenue throughout the years, many more chose not to enter this debate and instead concentrated on creating a unique black identity and culture elsewhere in Richmond. They knew that Monument Avenue not only delineated the “good” part of town from the “bad,” it also tangibly represented a city culture that had no use for black opinion. In Richmond, “heroes” were white men on horseback who died believing in slavery and racial hegemony.

However, the city’s landscape changed in 1996 when a sculpture of Arthur Ashe, a Richmond-born black tennis champion and rights activist who died of AIDS in 1993, was added to the company of Robert E. Lee, Jefferson Davis, and the others. That these names could be spoken in the

same breath was dizzying to many Richmonders, and the debate that preceded the unveiling of the Ashe monument struck chords and touched nerves among black and white citizens. The controversy was not simply a matter of white versus black; the statue had its supporters and detractors within both races. The complexity of the debate came from the deeply nuanced and often fractured black reactions to the concept of desegregating Monument Avenue, not from the more predictable white responses. The controversy caught the attention of the national media and the public, who quickly grasped that no place in America could offer a more complicated landscape on which to place a statue of Arthur Ashe than Richmond, Virginia.

Because of Monument Avenue's unique conception, the memorialization of a black man there presents a splendid opportunity to examine the public sculpture process in general, and especially how Richmond's inverted hegemonic structure of the 1990s affected the dynamics of the particular process that resulted in the Ashe statue. This paper examines the anatomy of the Arthur Ashe controversy as it unfolded in both local and national media sources, and in the Richmond City Council minutes. It supposes that the most viable way to gather an understanding of the debate is to analyze the coverage of and public response to the Ashe monument as presented in both the mainstream newspaper of Richmond,

The Times-Dispatch, and the city's historically black newspaper, The Free Press. Doing so will reveal some of the nuances of public opinion that emerged from this complicated situation.

This exploration will draw upon scholarship on monumentality and public memory – which suggests that debate is the inherent by-product of a society's effort to publicly “remember” people, events, or ideas – as a way to frame the dynamics of the debate. After considering the theories of oppositional forces that dominate scholarship on monumentality, this paper will ultimately conclude that such theories hold limited value in dissecting the Ashe situation. While the debate did, on the most basic level, unfold as the city government versus its people, to say that the debate was limited to these dynamics alone seriously undermines the depth of the controversy. Instead, the debate is best understood as a series of multifaceted disputes among the government, which claimed to be speaking for Richmond's “people” in one voice, and complicated groups of citizens, each of which had vastly different reasons for disagreeing with the city's efforts on their behalf. Disparate forces of history, power, politics, and race, in essence, shaped the Ashe debate.

An analysis of Richmond's racial history and political climate therefore is integral to explicating why the city provided such rich fodder for the debate. This study will investigate the evolution of Richmond's

governmental model, the relationship between its black and white citizens, the significance of the city's unique African-American community, and the commemorative history of Monument Avenue in order to understand why the Ashe situation is of such importance to the study of monumentality.

The historical context will clarify how national priorities and local power structures shifted between the years when Monument Avenue was conceived and when the Ashe monument was unveiled. Understanding this will demonstrate why the idea of including a statue of Arthur Ashe on Monument Avenue was so important to some Richmonders and so threatening to others.

## MONUMENT AVENUE AND THE NATIONAL COMMEMORATIVE MODE

As a product of the City Beautiful movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Monument Avenue was created to accommodate the changing demographics of Richmond after the Civil War. Once the proud capital of the Confederacy, Richmond had suffered incredible physical and ideological damage by the time the war ended with the city in flames in 1865. By 1870, Richmond found itself in the uncomfortable position of working towards swift and successful redevelopment with the help of Northern investments in local brick and cast-iron industries. With an irony not lost upon its inhabitants, this quintessentially Southern city adopted a Northern economy rooted in industry, finance, insurance, and banking. A new physical landscape defined by businesses like Tedegar Iron Works, Richmond Stove Works, Albemarle Paper Company, and Old Dominion Nail Works emerged from the rubble, as did a new social class of those made wealthy by these industries.<sup>2</sup>

Eventually, the landed gentry of old Virginia began to fall into the

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<sup>2</sup> Sarah Shields Driggs, Richard Guy Wilson, and Robert P. Winthrop, Richmond's Monument Avenue (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001) 15.

shadows of an industrial revolution propagated by Richmond's "New South" mentality. With this, an interesting dichotomy arose: white Richmonders understood that the city's economy and desired prosperity depended upon the adoption of "New South" characteristics; but, they also wished to preserve the character and integrity of the "Old South." Thus, Richmonders began investing deeply in the cult of the Lost Cause, a mentality that was developed by some white Southerners in response to defeat. The Lost Cause remembered the Confederacy as a gallant effort intended to preserve Southern heritage, culture, and social systems.<sup>3</sup>

Through the lens of the Lost Cause, the Civil War was seen as, above all, an ideological struggle between the North and the South about the intentions of the Founding Fathers in regard to states' rights (on matters of slavery, among other things). Generally speaking, this sentimentalized version of history maintained that the South had attempted to defend its proud and civilized agrarian culture, under which slaves supposedly lived happily, against the infiltration of Northern mercantile and industrial systems. The mythologized Lost Cause was prevalent in mainstream Southern culture, and it was preserved and reinforced through literature, veterans' organizations, and legal segregation as mandated by Jim Crow

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<sup>3</sup> Driggs, et al. 27.

legislation.<sup>4</sup>

John Bodnar, who examined the way American culture has remembered its past in Remaking America: Public Memory, Commemoration, and Patriotism in the Twentieth Century (1992), addressed the complicated nature of the Lost Cause psychology when he wrote:

This explanation of the past . . . served not only the psychological needs of defeated Southerners but especially the powerful interests of a rising class of southern industrialists who were anxious to resume activity with the North and who were assuming roles once played by the region's aristocracy.<sup>5</sup>

The proposal of Richmond's Monument Avenue in 1887, then, was a direct reaction to these conflicting interests and identities in the postwar years. The design itself was nothing unusual or remarkable. Like Boston's Commonwealth Avenue and New York's Fifth Avenue, it was precisely in line with the City Beautiful movement's call for grand tree-lined boulevards.<sup>6</sup> However, this particular avenue satisfied the identity of a city that was inextricably tied to the Lost Cause, even as that city was being propelled forward by its new, ironically Northern economy. By providing both a canvas upon which the new class could exhibit its wealth and a location upon which a proposed monument to Robert E. Lee could sit, the

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<sup>4</sup> Driggs, et al. 27-29.

<sup>5</sup> John Bodnar, Remaking America: Public Memory, Commemoration, and Patriotism in the Twentieth Century (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992) 31.

<sup>6</sup> Driggs, et al. 19.

new street made it seem as if both sides of Richmond's inharmonious personality could coexist. The street was a splendid example of urban planning, and, through it, Richmond could participate in the characteristically Northern Gilded Age while paying tribute to the fallen South.

Because it was deliberately designed to grow out of Franklin Street, which began at Virginia's Capital Park, Monument Avenue was infused with meaning before a single statue was placed upon it. Literally lengthening the axis upon which Richmond revolved, the avenue stretched outward from the city's old limits for about a mile and a half until it reached its terminus at Roseneath Road.<sup>7</sup> In 1890, Lee's statue was placed on a pastoral tract of land at what would be about a quarter of a mile from the Avenue's beginning, and the statue's unveiling was followed by the construction of a succession of grand homes built by wealthy whites. Monuments of J. E. B. Stuart and Jefferson Davis joined Lee's statue in 1907, and the Avenue was given its name after a statue of Thomas "Stonewall" Jackson was dedicated in 1919. The statue of the last Confederate hero to be commemorated, Matthew Fontaine Maury, was unveiled in 1929.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Driggs, et al. 6.

<sup>8</sup> Known more for his career in ocean exploration, Maury is sometimes called the "pathfinder of the sea." James E. DuPriest, Jr. and Douglas O. Tice, Jr., Monument & Boulevard: Richmond's Grand Avenues (Richmond, VA: Richmond Discoveries, 1996). See images of the Confederate statues in Appendix A.

As the Avenue extended west with each new monument, so did the glorious homes that were built along the street's edge. Although some modest houses and apartment buildings also popped up, the superior character of Monument Avenue was assured by the intentional inclusion of religious centers and by covenants in all land titles prohibiting black ownership.<sup>9</sup> Careful decisions like these made by the boulevard's early residents attempted to recreate some of the racial and social boundaries and customs that existed in pre-Civil War Richmond. Monument Avenue became, in essence, a tribute to the wealthy whites living among its statues.

Up to this point, Monument Avenue was a quintessential example of the larger commemorative pattern occurring throughout the United States during the American Renaissance, or the period between the 1870s and the 1930s. John Gillis, who explores the historical phases through which monumentality has passed in his book Commemorations: The Politics of National Identity (1994), describes the period as the national phase.<sup>10</sup> Constituting the most significant era of monument building in American history, the national phase finds its roots in the commemorative patterns of eighteenth-century Europe, after the new democratic governments were established to replace elite-based ancestral monarchs. Gillis states that

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<sup>9</sup> Driggs, et al. 125.

<sup>10</sup> John Gillis, ed. Commemorations: The Politics of National Identity (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994) introduction 3-20.

commemorations during the cultural shifts from monarchies to democracies and republics arose “directly out of an ideologically driven desire to break with the past, to construct as great a distance as possible between the new age and the old.”<sup>11</sup> The United States during the European revolutions, of course, had just gained its independence and was itself somewhat of a product of the strife abroad. Without yet the resources or a focused identity, the United States did not fully participate in the European era of monument building. But, Americans did embrace this commemorative view nearly one hundred years later, as they sought to rebuild and reinvent after the Civil War. This trend remained firmly in place in American culture through the Second World War.<sup>12</sup>

Specifically, the national phase in America described a time in which citizens and government officials were desperate to create a national history that boasted a unified people. A desire to heal the schisms resulting from the Civil War was combined with a longing to create a distinct American culture that would rival those of other great civilizations. In order to propagate this common message, citizens and officials commissioned a prolific number of classical monuments to honor those people – more specifically, those white men – who represented the distinctly American ideas that both the government and white citizens sought to perpetuate. By

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<sup>11</sup> Gillis 7.

<sup>12</sup> Gillis 8.

altering the physical landscape with statues, murals, and architecture that embodied aspirant values, American citizens attempted to impose a collective memory and a common ideal upon all passersby.<sup>13</sup> The hope was that the commemorative landscape would then discursively interact with the people who occupied it, leaving citizens endeavoring to embody these ideals themselves.<sup>14</sup>

The national phase in the United States reached its height with the creation of the National Mall in Washington, D.C., beginning with the Washington Monument in 1791 and extending through the completion of the Jefferson Memorial in 1938.<sup>15</sup> Each monument was, over time, carefully selected to represent the mission and vision of the United States, and its presence on the capital's landscape was intended to remind and redirect Americans towards their common purpose.

While the monuments that appeared on the Mall sought to unify a nation's ideals, regional representations throughout the United States highlight important differences in regional cultural values. Though Gillis' study does not give adequate attention to regional manifestations in the national phase, Richmond's Monument Avenue demonstrates that

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<sup>13</sup> Driggs, et al. 25.

<sup>14</sup> Gillis 10. This theory doesn't account for the fact that members of various subgroups interpret different meanings according to their specific needs and priorities. Each new interpretation thereby changes the landscape's intended meaning bit by bit.

<sup>15</sup> Andrea Gabor. "Even our most loved monuments had a trial by fire," Smithsonian May 1997: 97-101.

American commemorative patterns were affected by geography. While the South did participate in creating the public memory represented in Washington, D.C., it also participated in another, more regional “national” period by creating the Confederate-centric Monument Avenue at exactly the same time. To its creators, Monument Avenue was the National Mall that almost was: a celebration of the great white heroes of the Lost Cause. It was as representative of the Southern identity as the Mall was of our so-called national identity.

Indeed, the Southern-nationalist thrust was so strong in Richmond that the height of the proposed Lee monument was altered when it was realized that it would be more than ten feet shorter than Crawford and Roger’s 1858 Washington Monument in Richmond’s Capital Square. Upon the urging of Richmonders, artist Marius-Jean-Antonin Mercie reluctantly enlarged the Lee statue to twenty-one feet and the pedestal to forty feet so that Lee would stand taller than Washington.<sup>16</sup> This overcompensation demonstrated that Richmond was so deeply invested in the Lost Cause mentality throughout the national commemorative period that it feared people might interpret Washington, who was the ultimate icon of the nation as a whole, as more significant to its citizens than Robert E. Lee.

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<sup>16</sup> Driggs, et al. 48.

Of course, while some white Richmonders were fighting about the height of the Lee statue, some black Richmonders were installing monuments to men who had fought to maintain blacks as laborers and not policymakers. The reliance upon blacks in the erection of confederate statuary is indicative of how ironic Richmond's status quo was in the early nineteenth-century. Slavery had been abolished, but its social order clearly remained.

## **“A CITY WITHIN A CITY”: BLACKS AND WHITES IN RICHMOND**

In the forty years that passed between the dedications of the Lee and Maury monuments, the demographic makeup of Richmond transformed profoundly from a modest skeleton of the Confederacy to a bustling destination for industry and for the Great Migration from deeper south.<sup>17</sup> One of the most historically significant developments to occur in Richmond during the early part of the twentieth century was the establishment of Jackson Ward, the largest self-sustaining African-American entrepreneurial district in the South.<sup>18</sup>

Situated just blocks northeast from where Monument Avenue was developing, Jackson Ward was an area settled by free blacks and German immigrants in the mid-1800s.<sup>19</sup> After the adoption of the Fifteenth Amendment in the 1870s, the neighborhood was cordoned off as a gerrymandered voting district that restricted the voting power of both groups, thus weakening their political voices. While black Richmonders gained some political momentum in the 1880s by aligning with white

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<sup>17</sup> Marie Tyler-McGraw, At the Falls: Richmond, Virginia, & Its People (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994) 184-186.

<sup>18</sup> Tyler-McGraw 218-227.

<sup>19</sup> Charles Bethea, “Banks, Boutiques, and ‘The Deuce’: The Legacy of Jackson Ward,” Black History Museum and Cultural Center (Richmond, Virginia) Permanent exhibit, 1999.

German and Irish immigrants, the strength of the black vote was purposefully diluted by the annexation of white suburbs, fraudulent voting by whites, the incorporation of a poll tax in 1902, and the abolition of the black voting block of Jackson Ward in 1903.<sup>20</sup> Driven by a fear in the white community that blacks were gaining too much political power, these actions made it essentially impossible to elect black city council members, thereby rendering the black voice silent. When the Jim Crow laws of the early twentieth century formally segregated the races, the German immigrants developed their own enclaves, leaving Jackson Ward to become an African-American-based community.<sup>21</sup>

Stripped of all voting rights and political power, black Richmonders developed a distinct and thriving culture that operated independently of the white community in nearly all regards. African-American citizens kept their money in black-owned banks; they took their sick to black doctors; they shopped at black-owned grocers and retail shops; they worshipped at black churches; they resolved neighborhood issues between themselves; and they unwound at restaurants, theaters, and clubs that nurtured black soul and spirit.<sup>22</sup> Instead of attempting to infiltrate the status quo of a city that had no interest in hearing the black voice, black citizens turned to themselves

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<sup>20</sup> Tyler-McGraw 226-227.

<sup>21</sup> Driggs, et al. 54.

<sup>22</sup> Charles Bethea. Personal interview. November, 2000.

and built a unique community infrastructure to suit their own needs.

Because Richmond's hegemonic structure so blatantly denied black autonomy and in fact encouraged subservience, Jackson Ward was vital to black success and identity in Richmond.

Indeed, the significance of Jackson Ward within the context of late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century African-American history (and in the history of Richmond) cannot be overstated: it was home to the first black bank as well as the first female bank president in the country, and it was a bustling cultural center – both the “Harlem of the South” and “Black Wall Street.” Within the space of a couple of city blocks on the north side of Broad Street, and just blocks from an avenue that seemed to exalt racism, residents of Jackson Ward met the incredible challenge of prospering within the Jim Crow segregated capital of the Confederacy.<sup>23</sup>

The success of Jackson Ward thus allowed black Richmonders to virtually disassociate themselves from mainstream white culture. This may be why little evidence exists of significant black protest to the creation of Monument Avenue. Certainly, there were dissenters. Before the black voting block was dissolved in 1903, Richmond's city council had several black members who, in 1887 and 1890, refused to approve city funds for

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<sup>23</sup> The significance of Jackson Ward in African-American history is so profound that the National Trust for Historic Preservation recently included it on its 2001 list of the “11 Most Endangered Historic Places.” ([www.nationaltrust.org](http://www.nationaltrust.org), June 25, 2001).

ceremonies and appropriations relating to the monuments.<sup>24</sup> John Mitchell, one of the black city councilmen and editor of the Richmond Planet, wrote extensively about his opinion of Monument Avenue: “The men who talk most about the valor of Lee, and the blood of the brave Confederate dead are those who never smelt powder or engaged in battle. Most of them were at a table, either on top or under it when the war was going on.” He lamented that Richmond was being “decorated with emblems of the ‘Lost Cause’ ” and that the Lee monument was a symbol of a “legacy of treason and blood.”<sup>25</sup> Remarking upon the ironic dependence on black labor throughout the process of creating and installing the statue, Mitchell wrote, “He [the African American] put up the Lee Monument, and should the time come, will be there to take it down.”<sup>26</sup>

But, the overwhelming majority of black citizens lacked a platform to demonstrate resistance to the erection of Confederate statuary. The Lost Cause culture was entirely separate from the real world grit of black Richmond. While they were certainly offended, troubled, and discouraged by the creation of Monument Avenue, most black citizens were not interested in wasting their energy in protest when the mainstream culture did not allow them to be heard. The vibrancy and success of Jackson Ward

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<sup>24</sup> Driggs, et al. 49.

<sup>25</sup> Quoted in Driggs, et al. 49-54.

<sup>26</sup> Quoted in Driggs, et al. 59.

meant that black citizens had an insular environment in which to focus. White Richmonders weren't asking for black opinion, so black Richmonders didn't bother telling. By refusing to engage in the mainstream dialogue, Jackson Ward's residents avoided investing negative effort into something completely irrelevant to their daily existence.

By the 1950s, however, Richmond's black community faced a sobering reality. Following the construction of Interstate 95, which permanently slashed the neighborhood in two, Jackson Ward began to decline.<sup>27</sup> The impact of this physical change on the landscape, in combination with desegregation, caused many residents to move away and many businesses to dry up. The situation only worsened when "urban renewal" of the 1970s and 1980s resulted in widespread demolition of the neighborhood's historic buildings and in "insensitive" new construction.<sup>28</sup> Today, the neighborhood, which includes more than one hundred vacant buildings, is in disrepair and is threatened further by the construction of a new Richmond City Convention Center in the area.

During its height, Jackson Ward was the most powerful symbol of black success, autonomy, and cultural pride in Richmond. Its decline, then, had a tremendous impact on the confidence and independence of black Richmonders. Waverly Crawley, a current Jackson Ward activist who

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<sup>27</sup> Tyler-McGraw 282.

<sup>28</sup> Tyler-McGraw 298.

earned the nickname “Mayor of Second Street” because of his efforts on behalf of the neighborhood, recently stated:

Integration has done a lot of damage to the black community. Some of my black brothers and sisters disagree with what I’m saying, but in reality, I’m telling the truth. Integration was supposed to give us equal opportunity, but it never materialized. We were making more progress during segregation. All we wanted to have was equal opportunity. Then money could turn over in the community. Jackson Ward was a city within a city. In the days of segregation, I never thought about being segregated, because the only way we ever knew we were segregated was when we couldn’t go on the other side of Broad Street. Well, we could; we just didn’t.<sup>29</sup>

Crawley’s words highlight how integral the self-sustaining community of Jackson Ward had been to the black spirit and identity in Richmond. Losing this cultural center fractured what many African Americans had believed to be a sense of progress, making them acutely aware of how disenfranchised and vulnerable they were. White and black realities had indeed been successfully separated, but they were far from equal.

While some black businesses and organizations continued to thrive, the decline of Jackson Ward resulted in the decentralization of Richmond’s unique black culture and identity. At the same time, advances in the Civil Rights movement fostered the notion that blacks and whites should occupy a single landscape. Eventually, both white and black neighborhoods

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<sup>29</sup> Betty Booker, “Mayor of Second Street: Love for Jackson Ward keeps Waverly Crawley on the Move,” Richmond Times-Dispatch February 4, 2002, E1-E3.

developed in the empty land surrounding Monument Avenue, and the Confederate heroes became steadfast scenery on a street shared by both races.

Today, Monument Avenue is about five miles in length from beginning to end, and it both literally and figuratively crosses to the other side of the tracks (and Interstate 195), encompassing a far more diverse population than its founders had ever imagined. The fact that Monument Avenue is now the mailing address for both white and black families could send a powerful message about racial reconciliation. However, the meshing of the races has been far from idyllic. The presence of black residents on Monument Avenue is overshadowed by the fact that the street's original corridor from Lombardy to Belmont Streets exists now much as it did when it was first laid out more than one hundred years ago. The cobblestone pavement between the Stonewall Jackson statue at the Boulevard and the J.E.B. Stuart statue at Lombardy continue to send a firm message to pedestrians and motorists alike that *this* – and not the annex that extends westward and includes the Ashe statue and the majority of black residences – is Monument Avenue. It seems to speak for the city when it extols its superiority.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> See images VIII and IX in Appendix A.

Certainly, the unavoidable presence of this message must have had an incredible cumulative impact on the African-American community, which, in 1990, accounted for nearly 48 percent of the city's total population.<sup>31</sup> The dissolution of Jackson Ward's core meant that black Richmonders had to step away from the insular culture to which they had become accustomed and towards a lifestyle that worked in collaboration with white systems. But how would integration ever be possible when the mere existence of Monument Avenue served as a permanent reminder of the city's Old South social order?

In an eerie foreshadowing of the controversy that would follow his death, Arthur Ashe addressed in his autobiography the almost universal frustration felt by the black community towards Monument Avenue and what it seemed to represent:

Every Sunday morning I could see and hear on television Dr. Theodore F. Adams, minister of the huge, white First Baptist Church. That church confirmed its domination and its strict racial identity by its presence on Richmond's Monument Avenue, the avenue of Confederate heroes, with its statues of Stonewall Jackson, Jefferson Davis, J.E.B. Stuart, and Robert E. Lee. Didn't we in the black churches read the same Bible as those in First Baptist? Didn't the whites know how Jesus felt about the equality of human beings, about justice, and about the meek inheriting the earth?<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Michael Martz, "Blacks Returning to South," Richmond Times-Dispatch August 13, 2001. In 2000, blacks accounted for 58 percent of the city's population, making Richmond tenth among cities of 100,000 residents or more in terms of proportions of blacks.

<sup>32</sup> Arthur Ashe, Days of Grace (New York: Random House, 1994) 283.

Wasn't this, too, a city in which African Americans successfully created a self-sustaining economy and a thriving culture in the face of racism and segregation? Wasn't this also a city that housed more black Americans than it did white ones, where blacks had achieved remarkable success? To many, Monument Avenue was just a daily reminder of the separateness of the races and a constant affront to black accomplishment.

## HOW ARTHUR ASHE ENDED UP ON MONUMENT AVENUE

The question of whether Monument Avenue would offend the African-American community was never a significant concern to those involved in the creation of the street. Widespread disenfranchisement meant that black opinion was of little value or concern to a city culture dominated by a white worldview. However, something in the cultural fabric of America and, to some extent, of Richmond shifted during the social movements of the late 1960s and early 1970s, such that some Americans began questioning the way they remembered their histories – or rather history – up to that point. Suddenly the integrity and finality of Monument Avenue was not as set in stone as the heavy marble made it seem.

In attempting to account for this cultural shift, John Gillis reasoned that the social movements of the late 1960s washed away most traces of the national commemorative mode, which had already begun to disintegrate in the United States after World War II. Furthermore, he argued, the emergence of a post-national phase was consistent with social historical trends, or the tendency to reevaluate history from the perspective of previously marginalized groups, that also characterized this time period.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Gillis 9.

The notable absence of women and minorities from the sculptural landscape was criticized, as was the way the traditional soldiers' monuments and Memorial Day parades promoted stoic patriotism. Dissatisfaction with these kinds of monuments eventually led to formal commemorative structures emphasizing inclusion and emotional participation.<sup>34</sup> Unlike the image of white military men used throughout the national mode to characterize the supposed sentiment of everybody, monuments of the post-national phase began to acknowledge diversity and cultural pluralism. The trends in commemoration thus shifted from creating pieces like the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier to pieces like Maya Lin's Vietnam Veterans Memorial.<sup>35</sup>

Richmond city council member Henry Richardson seemed to have an awareness of this new commemorative mode when he first proposed desegregating Monument Avenue in 1991. He said the idea for new statues to black leaders like L. Douglas Wilder, the nation's first black governor,

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<sup>34</sup> Gillis 13.

<sup>35</sup> Gillis 13-14. While the Vietnam Veterans Memorial is most often considered the turning point for public sculpture of this kind, other memorials have recently appeared which also illustrate this trend. All are acutely aware of the contemporary pluralistic society, and all attempt to legitimize historically marginal groups and ideas by representing them in public space. For example, the Civil Rights Memorial (also designed by Maya Lin) in Montgomery, Alabama, is a powerful statement in a historically racist and pro-segregation city; the acknowledgment of Franklin Delano Roosevelt's disability in the new monument to him on the National Mall is a clear departure from our historical propensity to equate intellectual and political strength with physical prowess; and the proposed addition of a statue of Martin Luther King, Jr. delivering a speech on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial is profoundly symbolic of the role that monument played throughout the Civil Rights movement.

occurred to him as he watched newly liberated citizens in Russia tear down statues of communist leaders. "In this country, we don't have to tear down a statue to symbolize change," he said. "We can let different eras stand together."<sup>36</sup> Although his plan was rejected, the idea was posed again in 1994 when Governor Wilder himself suggested that a newly created statue of Arthur Ashe be placed on the Avenue.<sup>37</sup> Ashe, the first black man to win the Wimbledon tennis tournament, grew up in Richmond and had died of complications from AIDS in 1993. He had often been denied access to city tennis courts because of his race, thus prompting him to leave Richmond in his teens to pursue his tennis career in a more conducive environment.<sup>38</sup>

The statue of Ashe, designed by local artist Paul DiPasquale, was created with Ashe's authorization under the intent that it would stand outside an African-American sports hall of fame proposed for Richmond in the early 1990s.<sup>39</sup> In a written communication approving DiPasquale's request to sculpt him, Ashe asked to be captured in an informal pose with books. He added only in an afterthought that perhaps a tennis racket could

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<sup>36</sup> John Harris, "Monumental Issue Divides Old Dominion," Washington Post September 29, 1991, C2. Arthur Ashe was not on the originally proposed list of statue-worthy blacks.

<sup>37</sup> Gary Robertson, "Wilder: Put Ashe on Monument: Ex-governor Helps Drive for Statue," Richmond Times-Dispatch December 6, 1994, B3.

<sup>38</sup> Gordon Hickey, "Chance Meeting Inspired Sculptor; Mayor Says DiPasquale Monument Should be Part of Sports Hall of Fame," Richmond Times-Dispatch July 7, 1996, A1.

<sup>39</sup> The idea for the African-American sports hall of fame was inspired by Ashe's trilogy entitled A Hard Road to Glory (New York: Harper Trade, 1989).

be included as well.<sup>40</sup> With the installation of the sports hall of fame in mind, DiPasquale took Ashe's charge to sculpt him "as straightforward as possible" and represented the athlete in a warm-up suit with his arms above his head, holding books in one hand and a tennis racket in the other. Four children, seen from the waist up, surrounded Ashe, each one reaching out an arm in his direction.<sup>41</sup>

Following Ashe's death, DiPasquale joined with Ashe's nonprofit organization, Virginia Heroes Incorporated, to finish the monument post mortem. The organization, which was founded in 1990, created an Arthur Ashe Monument Committee to facilitate a public commemoration of Ashe through DiPasquale's work. Ashe's widow, Jeanne Moutoussamy-Ashe, worked with DiPasquale to ensure that the artist achieved a proper likeness of Ashe. In 1994, a model was completed and approved by Ashe's relatives, at which point the Ashe Monument Committee showed the proposed statue to City of Richmond officials and began negotiations regarding possible public display. Soon after, city council created an Ashe Site Selection Committee, thus beginning the long list of city-sponsored committees that would be involved in the Ashe statue. Approval of the city's Public Art Commission, Urban Design Committee, City Planning Commission,

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<sup>40</sup> Paul DiPasquale, personal interview, May 28, 2001.

<sup>41</sup> A more detailed description of stylistic elements of each of Monument Avenue's statues and their installations can be found in Driggs, et al.

Architectural Review Committee, and the Richmond City Council itself would ultimately follow.<sup>42</sup>

Though Governor Wilder had been the first to suggest Monument Avenue as a location for the Ashe monument, the idea was initially dismissed as unrealistic. It was not until the Site Selection Committee proposed a traffic circle on Monument Avenue as the most desirable of its five suggested sites that Wilder's proposal became a reality. Meanwhile, after a few modifications, DiPasquale's design was approved by Richmond's Planning Commission in June of 1995.<sup>43</sup>

The approval process was not easy. Members of different committees criticized the statue's artistic merit, calling it "awkward," "too casual," and "uninspired."<sup>44</sup> Opponents also thought that the monument's design was inappropriate for a traffic circle because it was meant to be viewed from only one side, something DiPasquale argues comes from the fact it was originally designed to be placed at eye level and in front of a sports hall of fame.<sup>45</sup> Some said that, when viewed from behind, Ashe looked as if he were being "arrested or held up," and others resisted how gaunt and wan Ashe appeared.<sup>46</sup> Though DiPasquale added weight and muscle mass to the

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<sup>42</sup> Driggs, et al. 92.

<sup>43</sup> DiPasquale interview.

<sup>44</sup> Hickey, "Chance Meeting. . ."

<sup>45</sup> DiPasquale interview.

<sup>46</sup> Driggs, et al. 92.

figure in response to this criticism, he was committed to keeping Ashe's likeness in line with how he looked in the last years of his life, from his eyeglasses and characteristically unlaced tennis shoes to the look of a body ravaged by AIDS.<sup>47</sup>

Though the criticisms were vast and contentious, it was the speed with which the statue was ultimately approved by these committees that created the real controversy, leading to accusations that the measure had been passed without allowing a forum for public debate. When it was confirmed that limiting public opinion had indeed been part of the strategy used by Virginia Heroes Incorporated in order to expedite the city's approval, a furor arose among the public, and, consequently, Richmond City Council took up the issue.<sup>48</sup>

In July of 1995, 179 people spoke at a six-hour public hearing held by the city council. Richmond's African-American mayor, Leonidas Young, suggested that an alternative location in Byrd Park near the once-segregated tennis courts be considered for the monument. He outlined an elaborate plan for honoring Ashe with a downtown park in his name, adjacent to the African-American Sports Hall of Fame for which the statue was originally built. Young suggested that resuscitating the proposal for the Hall of Fame

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<sup>47</sup> DiPasquale interview. See images I and II in Appendix A.

<sup>48</sup> "Arthur Ashe Monument Remains Without a Home," Charleston Daily Mail June 28, 1995, News, 3C.

(which had lost funding and initiative after Ashe's death) would have a tremendously positive financial impact on Richmond, much in the same way the Rock 'n Roll Hall of Fame had on Cleveland, Ohio. Complicating things further, Young went on to suggest that statues to African Americans who have led "human rights movements in Virginia and in our nation" be placed on Monument Avenue as well. Young did not suggest, however, whether or not he considered Ashe to be one such African American.<sup>49</sup>

Those favoring the Byrd Park location said that the statue would be as powerful a statement outside the tennis courts to which Ashe had been denied access as it would be on Monument Avenue. In general, the proponents of the Byrd Park site did not necessarily question the idea of commemorating Ashe in some way, but questioned instead the aesthetic wisdom of placing a modern sculpture in a historic neighborhood. Meanwhile, a group called Citizens for Excellence in Public Art (CEPA) challenged the artistic quality of DiPasquale's statue regardless of where it was placed. This group circulated a petition to block the monument and requested instead that an international competition be held – as had been done for the Confederate monuments – for a higher-quality statue.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Margaret Edds & Robert Little, "Ashe Gets Place on Monument Ave; Richmond Council OKs Statue Site in 7-0 Vote; Compromise Denied," *Virginian-Pilot* (Norfolk) July 18, 1995, A1.

<sup>50</sup> Though Citizens for Excellence in Public Art were at first encouraged in their pursuit of an international competition, they were subsequently derailed by the city council who dismissed the group as a nearly all white effort that was non-inclusive of blacks. Citizens

For some people, like Richmond resident Robert H. Lamb, the stated concern was not about artistic quality, but rather historic integrity. Lamb suggested that no matter how worthy Ashe was of commemoration, he was simply not compatible with the Confederates: "It would be a flight of fancy to suggest that Arthur Ashe viewed the Confederate heroes on Monument Avenue as kindred spirits." Other opponents of the statue (many wearing Confederate insignia) implied that it would demean Lee, Davis, and the others to include Ashe on the Avenue, and that the boulevard's function was as a permanent tribute to Richmond's Confederate roots.<sup>51</sup>

Young, wary of the national implications of the debate on Richmond's already shaky racial reputation, was careful to suggest to the Richmond Times-Dispatch that "this debate has little to do with race except in the hearts and minds of a very few individuals."<sup>52</sup> However, at least one exchange between himself and several council members betrayed that statement: Councilman Anthony Jones suggested that Stonewall Jackson's monument be removed and that Ashe's monument be installed in its place because that location was "the most primary piece of property in the city."

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for Excellence in Public Art had even more post-nationalistic monuments in mind for Ashe. Hickey writes, "Perhaps the piece honoring Ashe could have been something other than a statue. . . For example, like the Vietnam Memorial wall in Washington. . . or an artist could have created a quiet open space for contemplation, on the order of the John Lennon Strawberry Fields memorial in New York." Gordon Hickey, "A Monumental Change for the City," Richmond Times-Dispatch July 9, 1996, A1.

<sup>51</sup> Edds & Little, A1.

<sup>52</sup> Edds & Little, A1.

When Young challenged that proposal as unrealistic, Jones defended it as “no crazier than the ones on the table now” because, after all, Jackson had “made no contribution to the world.” Young replied: “There are those who would argue a significant contribution was made.” City Councilman Chuck Richardson chimed in to say, “I can’t believe I am hearing that. I’m just glad I’m not picking cotton.” Young ended that thread of conversation by warning Jones and Richardson that “You will become known as the black radical racist of Richmond, Virginia, and you will never be able to erase that.”<sup>53</sup>

Leading supporters for the Monument Avenue site were Ashe’s relatives (except his widow, who sat silent) and representatives from the city’s government (except Young, who wasn’t yet willing to abandon the financial potential of the hall of fame). They agreed with Wilder’s suggestion that placing a statue of Ashe among the Confederate heroes on Monument Avenue would send “a transcending message” about racial tolerance and healing.<sup>54</sup> Proponents at the meeting emphasized that Ashe had been more than just a tennis player, and that he should be commemorated for his humanitarian efforts as well. This stance was illustrated by one speaker who stated, “no hero is greater than any other

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<sup>53</sup> Tom Campbell and Mike Allen, “Hearing puts focus on city: Many take advantage of change to speak out,” Richmond Times-Dispatch July 18, 1995, A10.

<sup>54</sup> “The Timeline for a Monument,” Roanoke Times & World News July 10, 1996, Extra, 1.

hero, whether he is a defeated Confederate or a great humanitarian.”

Johnny Ashe suggested how absurd the debate was, and offered that his brother would be “reduced to tears” and “thoroughly disgusted” by the controversy surrounding the statue. Noting the national attention that worried Young, Ashe’s brother concluded, “The world is watching. Will this become a modern day war of hypocrisy, or will the city of Richmond do the right thing?”<sup>55</sup>

This challenge seemed to be what ultimately pushed the city council in July of 1995 to approve the Ashe statue on Monument Avenue under the condition that it would stay there until the sports hall of fame was completed or until five years had past.<sup>56</sup> Amid continuing protest, ground was broken in August, and in December the Commission of Architectural Review approved the statue’s design with a few slight modifications to the arms and the angle of the head. The anti-boulevard argument briefly received more attention in January of 1996 when Ashe’s widow, Jeanne Moutoussamy-Ashe, wrote an open letter to the Richmond Times-Dispatch suggesting that her late husband authorized a statue for a sports hall of fame, not Monument Avenue.<sup>57</sup> Moutoussamy-Ashe criticized the proposed site, and stated that her husband would have never posed in a sweat suit

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<sup>55</sup> Edds & Little, A1.

<sup>56</sup> The five-year date passed on October of 2001.

<sup>57</sup> Jeanne Moutoussamy-Ashe, “A New Year’s Wish for Richmond: Accept Arthur’s Vision,” Richmond Times-Dispatch January 1, 1996, editorial, A7.

had he thought the statue would end up on Monument Avenue. Despite these last-minute efforts by Ashe's widow to derail the site, the Ashe statue was unveiled on Monument Avenue on Ashe's birthday, July 10, in 1996.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Gordon Hickey, "Changes made in Ashe Statue; But Issue of Where to Locate it Revived," Richmond Times-Dispatch January 2, 1996, A1.

## ANALYSIS: MEANINGS AND IMPLICATIONS

And so a statue of Arthur Ashe desegregated Monument Avenue.

While the permanent change to Richmond's ideological landscape alone was vastly significant, the way in which the city's citizens reacted to the uncomfortable process leading up to the monument's approval spoke of an even greater conflict. The proposal to add Ashe to Monument Avenue had threatened to fracture the iconographical identity of an extraordinarily racially complicated city that was inextricably connected to the symbols on this street. The process of approving the statue had aroused deeply rooted, seething, and highly sensitive rifts, forcing a dialogue on race relations within a city that had, to this point, functioned by operating within separate spheres and by repressing racial issues.

Ultimately, then, the fact that the Ashe statue created controversy is not surprising. From the beginning of recorded history, debate has been as much a part of commemorative statues as bronze and marble. A common thread throughout scholarship on public memory – which forms the foundation for scholarship on public sculpture – is that controversy is an

inevitable part of the “remembering” process.<sup>59</sup> As Bert Kulbi, former director of the Art in Public Spaces division of the National Endowment for the Arts said: “If no one debates it, why have it? The process and the debate are very much a part of public art itself.”<sup>60</sup>

The dominant theories in public memory suggest that debate results when conflicting interests within a society – or so-called oppositional forces – wrangle over how a certain person, place, or idea should be remembered. The players may change from place to place, but the dynamics of contention do not. Such theories, posited by scholars like Pierre Nora and David Lowenthal, are based upon the assumption that shared memories (and the sculptures embodying them) can benefit humanity by serving as cohesive agents among members of increasingly pluralistic societies. According to this body of scholarship, debate ensues when two dichotomous forces within one society quarrel over which collective experiences warrant permanent placement within the shared memory and in what form.

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<sup>59</sup> As Kurt Savage points out, theories about oppositional forces in public memory have been developed by Pierre Nora in “Between History and Memory” (memory vs. history, internal vs. external); by Paul Connerton in How Societies Remember (incorporated vs. inscribed); by David Lowenthal in The Past is a Foreign Country (living vs. dead); and by John Bodnar in Remaking America: Public Memory, Commemoration, and Patriotism in the Twentieth Century (vernacular vs. official).

<sup>60</sup> Quoted in Gabor. Kulbi made the comment in 1995 in reference to the Franklin Roosevelt monument debate.

The Ashe statue controversy clouds the value of the oppositional forces theory because the statue's debate was not strictly a quarrel between any two forces, but was in fact shaped by a combination of history, power, politics, and race. Thus, the Ashe debate cannot be seen in terms of a single, us-versus-them dichotomy, but must be viewed instead through a series of oppositional lenses. As we have seen, the controversy pitted brother against sister-in-law, artist against art critic, Confederate purist against social historian, and black against white, along with many other combinations of disparate opinions. Within this flurry of conflicting agendas was a tension between the government and certain factions within its people that, as it played out, revealed scars of a long history of racial inequity and significant insight into the racial-political dynamics in Richmond. This tension between the government and its citizens is where the heart of the Ashe debate lies.

In fact, one scholar within the oppositional forces school does boil the public memory debate down to a struggle between the government and its people. John Bodnar, in Remaking America, argues that controversy ensues as the government attempts to promote one version of public memory (based usually in patriotism) while its citizens reinterpret it according to their needs and priorities. In doing so, the people threaten to dismantle permanently the government's version of reality (creating the potential for

all kinds of serious political ramifications), which leads the government to promote its rendition even more forcibly. Bodnar describes this relationship as an ideological struggle over “vernacular” versus “official.” He summarizes this concept by stating that, “normally vernacular expressions convey what social reality feels like rather than what it should be like.”<sup>61</sup> Conceptions of “what it should be like” are left to the so-called official realm, the government.

Bodnar’s theory sheds an interesting light on the Ashe situation when one considers the political culture of Richmond leading up to 1996. The root of the Ashe controversy is grounded in the fact that Richmond’s new hegemonic structure in the middle 1990s defied the traditional governing model that had been in place for much of the city’s history. Beginning in the early 1970s, Richmond’s official and governmental bodies shifted to incorporate a black majority. By 1977, that majority was being headed by Henry L. Marsh III, the city’s first black mayor. “The team,” as the members of the black majority were called, was powerful and audacious enough to fire white city officials it saw as obstacles to the advancement of black issues. The sudden shift in power caused quite a stir among white Richmonders.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Bodnar 14.

<sup>62</sup> Michael Paul Williams, “Black History Month Spotlight: Henry Marsh,” Richmond Times-Dispatch February 18, 2002, E1.

The old Jackson Ward community had succeeded in part because it housed a self-made, vernacular environment within which an otherwise mute black community could manifest its vernacular expressions. Now, with control of the city's governing body, blacks finally had an official political capacity within which to act and be heard. This new platform, coupled with a commemorative mode that offered more diverse public sculpture like Maya Lin's Vietnam Wall, led to Richardson's 1991 proposal and, eventually, the addition of Ashe to Monument Avenue.

If one follows the logic of the post-national commemorative environment, the inclusion of a monument to a black Virginian on an avenue that had for more than one hundred years celebrated and defended the Confederate heroes would seem to indicate a remarkable evolution in Richmond's racial attitudes. Furthermore, the state's growing black political presence, as seen by the election of the nation's first black governor in 1989 and the appointment of another black mayor, would suggest that the black's public voice was finally receiving accurate representation. That the mayoral position in Richmond was earned by city council appointment rather than through a general election didn't seem to matter; this was a new day for Virginia.

And this new day had been earned. The struggle to this point had been clear; Richmond's city council had become a majority-black body only

after a decade-long, racially charged court battle over charges by black activists that the city planned to annex land in adjacent Chesterfield County. Activists charged that doing so was a purposeful attempt to dilute the black vote and maintain the all white City Council by gaining 44,000 white voters in exchange for economically valuable land. This case ultimately made it to the United States Supreme Court in 1972, which immediately froze city-wide elections as it attempted to sort through the ugly accusations. Throughout the trying of the case, evidence mounted that the city government had attempted to minimize the power of a growing black population, a sentiment reinforced by then-Richmond mayor Phil J. Bagley, Jr. when he said: "As long as I am mayor of the city of Richmond, the niggers won't take over this town. . . Niggers aren't qualified to run this city."<sup>63</sup> The Supreme Court ultimately ruled that the annexation was unconstitutional and racially motivated, and the election freeze ended.<sup>64</sup>

The first black majority was installed on city council in March of 1977, instilling fear and doom among white Richmonders, who began fleeing the city in alarming numbers. A panic surrounding the new black majority city government prompted the state government to take title of the Lee monument for fear that the new city leadership would, as black newspaper

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<sup>63</sup> Richard Foster, "The Tale of King Henry and His Court." Richmond Magazine (March 2002): 35-37, 73.

<sup>64</sup> Foster 35.

editor John Mitchell had suggested in 1890, tear it down.<sup>65</sup> However, some of the initial tension between the state and city governments eased by the late 1980s with the election of L. Douglas Wilder, who was the grandson of former slaves. His presence as the nation's first black governor created a sense that a new age was beginning, and it led to the idea of commemorating these racial achievements in the same way that the Confederates had been recognized. Doing so, it was thought, would positively advance race relations in the city.

Suddenly, however, the fact that Richmond was led by an appointed mayor, who was charged by the newly empowered black city council, not by the people themselves, became clear. Government officials failed to anticipate that the majority of Richmond citizens – both black and white – did not think like them; they did not share and would not accept the government's vision of racial healing and progress.

The idea of desegregating Monument Avenue threatened many whites from the moment Henry Richardson proposed it in 1991. That measure supposedly failed because most of the men who were suggested as worthy of commemoration – Governor Wilder, Samuel Tucker, and Oliver Hill – were still alive, and there was a general agreement that canonization

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<sup>65</sup> Harris.

on the Avenue should be given to “nobody that’s alive.”<sup>66</sup> However, the more likely reason that the proposed men did not appear in bronze on Monument Avenue stemmed from their connection to the Civil Rights movement. As if Wilder’s standing as the first black governor wasn’t threatening enough to those resisting the new social order, the presence of Tucker and Hill – who were integral leaders in the desegregation in Virginia – on the Avenue was inconceivable. In the words of Kirk Savage, who has written extensively on nineteenth-century monumentality in America and has studied Monument Avenue, “Many local whites dug in to ‘protect’ the Confederate landscape from such a direct assault on its guiding principle.”<sup>67</sup>

The resistance to Richardson’s 1991 proposal led city officials to identify a less polarizing subject to champion for commemoration. Ashe’s death in 1993 seemed to offer the perfect solution: a black hero who was at once a popular icon. The fact that, coincidentally, a statue of him was already in the works made Ashe the perfect compromise. His candidacy as a representative of the new social order was enhanced by his personal friendship with the Wilder family and his political support of the governor himself. This, in addition to Ashe’s athletic and humanitarian

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<sup>66</sup> Harris.

<sup>67</sup> Kirk Savage, Standing Soldiers, Kneeling Slaves: Race War, and Monument in Nineteenth-Century America (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997) 212.

accomplishments, made him a hero both city and state administrations could endorse as the subject of their post-national “transcending message.” Thus, the statue was essentially appropriated by the government and placed on Monument Avenue in order to represent the changing of the tides in Richmond. This is well illustrated by the political rhetoric used to describe the monument’s function. For example, when the idea of a statue for the boulevard was finally approved, Vice Mayor Conrad stated that there is “unanimity on this council that we need to reconcile Richmond’s history with its future.”<sup>68</sup> Such reconciliation is precisely the function of social history, the foundation of the post-national commemorative movement.

The speed with which the proposed statue of Ashe was nearly passed through the city’s approval process highlighted the council’s political agenda. The irony of council’s political action was that the forced social reality they attempted to promote – the idea that the city of Richmond was ready to symbolize permanently “racial progress and healing” – was not unlike the particular heroic identity that their white counterparts monumentalized within the landscape of the national phase. Having learned from a white governing model, which had consistently failed to incorporate black opinion into its actions, the new black majority government operated without seeking the opinion or approval of any of its

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<sup>68</sup> Edds & Little.

citizens.

When Richmond's Planning Commission approved the statue and the Monument Avenue site without seeking public opinion, debate ensued. The newspaper accounts of the time – those written throughout the city council's handling of the matter – suggested a sense of urgency and frustration from government officials. The January 4, 1996, edition of the Richmond Times-Dispatch hinted that, because of the delays, council members feared Richmond might be missing the chance to make a statement. That same article quoted Councilwoman Viola O. Baskerville as saying, "Somewhere there will be the first monument to Arthur Ashe. Whether or not Richmond will be the location is the question."<sup>69</sup> Another councilman agreed when he said, "To delay this is absolutely ridiculous."<sup>70</sup>

While the city council was anxious about the levels of decision-making that were prolonging the placement of the Ashe statue on Monument Avenue, they were actually setting a historical precedent for quickness. In an article entitled "A Monumental History of Squabbling Over Statues," Richmond Times-Dispatch staff writer Mark Holmberg wrote, "if there is anything unusual about the progress of the monument to Richmond native and tennis star Ashe, who died three years ago, it's the

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<sup>69</sup> Gordon Hickey, "Original Position Affirmed; Ashe-On-Monument Supporters Rally," Richmond Times-Dispatch January 4, 1996, A1.

<sup>70</sup> Hickey A1.

whirlwind speed at which it has been progressing.”<sup>71</sup> The creation and debate stages of all the Confederate statues on Monument Avenue were far more painstaking and lengthy than they were in the case of the Ashe monument; it took forty-three years, according to Holmberg, to agree on the particulars of the J.E.B. Stuart statue, for example.

However, the delays involved with the Confederate statues were different than the ones associated with the Ashe monument because of the difference in nature of the commemorative periods.

The Confederate delays had traditionally nationalistic reasons. For example, Holmberg notes that the Confederate officer Jubal Early became enraged when he learned the marble base for Lee’s statue would be quarried in Maine. This contradicted the Southern-nationalist statement that the Lee monument was supposed to make, and construction was delayed as the issue was debated. Indeed, while often driven by sectionalism, the issues that delayed the Lee statue were never based on the fundamental question of whether or not such a monument would represent the sentiment of the government and the people; the delays instead were about maintaining an appropriate Southern-nationalism.<sup>72</sup> The strong sense of nationalism – or, in

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<sup>71</sup> Mark Holmberg, “A Monumental History of Squabbling Over Statues,” Richmond Times-Dispatch January 7, 1996, A1.

<sup>72</sup> Savage contends that the agendas of the government and the people were for the most part indistinguishable throughout most of the national mode, thus creating an atmosphere that didn’t consider whatever portions of the population might disagree with the government, especially a government that was supposed to be ‘of the people.’

this case, Confederatism—never even considered the possibility that commemoration of Lee or any of the other Confederate heroes could be offensive to blacks. Not surprisingly, this was the same time period that fostered the stereotypes and mythologies that implied slavery was a misunderstood institution that was appreciated by masters and slaves alike.

Conversely, the anxiety experienced by the city council in 1996 seemed to stem from a fear that the people would not agree to the conception of the social reality that would be promoted by Ashe on Monument Avenue. The failure to pass quickly the motion indicated that there would be resistance, and this threatened the post-national need to force a collective memory for the sake of fostering a communal identity.<sup>73</sup> The city council wanted to pass the measure through the bureaucratic ranks as quickly as possible so that the statue could be installed and commence its redefinition of reality. Essentially, the sooner the government could implant it upon the landscape, the sooner “the monument’s rhetorical claims of popular status [would become] a self-fulfilling prophecy.”<sup>74</sup> Savage’s description of the striking function of nineteenth-century monuments suggests exactly what the Richmond governments hoped to accomplish by so expediently applying the Ashe statue to the Confederate-based social reality. He writes:

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<sup>73</sup> Gillis 9.

<sup>74</sup> Savage 7.

Begun as a project designed by particular actors for particular political ends, the monument was transformed into the image of the people—even if some part of the people took the unusual step of contesting that image. Public monuments exercised a curious power to erase their own political origins and become sacrosanct.<sup>75</sup>

The role of Ashe's nonprofit organization—Virginia Heroes Incorporated—was important in encouraging this result because, as a non-government entity, it gave the illusion that a monument to Ashe was in fact the desire of *all* the people. This is consistent with Savage's theory that monuments are “supposed to arise spontaneously by popular demand, only then to be donated to the state for safekeeping.”<sup>76</sup> Again, while Savage's discussion stems from his analysis of nineteenth-century monuments, his explanation of this “for the people” idea applies to the role of the Virginia Heroes Incorporated in the formation of the Ashe monument as well. He writes:

Monuments were “true” only insofar as they seemed to display the people's heart. Most monuments therefore originated not as official projects of the state but as volunteer enterprises sponsored by associations of “public-spirited” citizens and funded by individual donations. These voluntary associations often had direct links to officialdom, but they achieved legitimacy only by manufacturing popular enthusiasm (and money) for the project. Sponsors usually worked hard to sustain the fiction that they were merely agents of a more universal collective whose shared memory

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<sup>75</sup> Savage 7.

<sup>76</sup> Savage 7.

the project embodied.<sup>77</sup>

In order to make the Ashe monument seem as if it were a display of “the people’s heart,” it had to be connected to a philanthropic, volunteer organization. That the organization in charge was Ashe’s own belies the theory that the monument evolved out of spontaneous public sentiment. Furthermore, the involvement of political players – namely Governor Wilder – in the group suggests that construction of the Ashe monument was politically driven.<sup>78</sup>

The reasons why Richmonders, as a whole, rejected the idea of the Ashe statue are difficult to assess. Perhaps the “people” were unwilling to accept the city’s manufactured allegiance to Ashe because his name and memory had been widely associated with different places and organizations throughout the United States. A June 16, 1996, article in the Richmond Times-Dispatch entitled “Arthur Ashe and the Quest for Cash” cited eight places from New York City to California that connected themselves with Ashe. This revelation led the writer to conclude that, “Richmond is not the center of the Arthur Ashe World.”<sup>79</sup> It is difficult to endorse a hometown

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<sup>77</sup> Savage 6.

<sup>78</sup> Gordon Hickey, January 2, 1996. While Virginia Heroes Incorporated did solicit private donations, they received most of the \$400,000 from people who were personally connected to Ashe. Richmond’s substantial donation of \$100,000 further illustrates how the monument was integral to unifying the city’s version of social reality.

<sup>79</sup> Gordon Hickey, “Arthur Ashe and the Quest for Cash,” Richmond Times-Dispatch June 16, 1996, B1.

hero with multiple hometowns.

Thus, the public debate was caused in part because affection for Ashe “did not naturally find resonance within the hearts and minds of ordinary people.”<sup>80</sup> Of course, it is impossible to discern exactly who the opposing “people” were; the post-national emphasis on pluralism reminds us that the “people” actually consists of many different subgroups, and it is difficult to determine how the opinions regarding the Ashe monument broke down according to race, gender, and class. However, a poll conducted by the Richmond Times-Dispatch in February of 1996 indicates how some “people” (in this case meaning “not the government”) reacted to placing the Ashe statue on the boulevard. The results indicate that 95 percent of the 415 adults questioned knew about the controversy surrounding the Ashe monument. Eighty-four percent of those people said they had seen pictures of DiPasquale’s statue of Ashe, and 76 percent of them said they liked the statue. However, 53 percent of those familiar with the controversy felt an Ashe monument did not belong on Monument Avenue and 13 percent had not decided.<sup>81</sup> While subject to the criticism that polling does not necessarily reflect public opinion fairly, these numbers, in combination with the opposition recorded in the newspapers, do confirm that Richmonders

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<sup>80</sup> Bodnar 17.

<sup>81</sup> Gordon Hickey, “Liking the Work, Not the Place; Many Don’t Back Site on Monument,” Richmond Times-Dispatch March 4, 1996, A1. See Appendix B for more information on the survey.

rejected the government's version of a shared social reality.

Although these polls provide interesting insight into how the debate was playing out in the mainstream media, they do not reveal anything about the unspoken aspects of the controversy. John Harris of the Washington Post echoed the sentiments of other journalists when he summed up the controversy by writing: "Adding statues to Wilder and other black achievers would be a potent symbol of racial progress and healing. Or it would be an insult to the heroes of an earlier, misunderstood age whose memories this *Champs Élysées* of the South was intended to preserve." While Harris's description accurately presents how the debate was publicly discussed, it in fact grossly oversimplifies the issues lurking under the surface of public discourse. A history of minimizing overtly racial dialogue in Richmond's public forums meant that the Ashe controversy actually played out on both the superficial level described by Harris' Post article and on a deeper level that was too complicated and disconcerting for recognition in the mainstream media.

This hidden level was fuelled by blacks who felt that Ashe's inclusion on Monument Avenue was an insult to both the man and his race. Jeanne Moutoussamy-Ashe summed up this perspective in her open letter to the Richmond Times-Dispatch on January 1, 1996. She wrote, "I have always felt that in all this controversy, the spirit that Arthur gave Richmond

has been overlooked. I am afraid that a statue of Arthur Ashe on Monument Avenue honors Richmond, Virginia, more than it does its son, his legacy, and his life's work."<sup>82</sup> This statement precisely identifies the government's political agenda; by rejecting it in such a public forum, Moutoussamy-Ashe articulated the view of many black citizens who saw standing beside Confederate heroes as more of an insult than an honor. Furthermore, her statement provided a foil to the assumption made by one Richmonder in the Washington Post that anyone disagreeing with the proposal must be a racist: "If you come out against anything civil rights-wise, you're considered a bigot."<sup>83</sup> However, Moutoussamy-Ashe's perspective suggested that, for some people, the debate had less to do with race and more to do with the false usurpation of Ashe's memory in order to promote a social reality.

More insight into black opinion can be gathered from the editorial letters that appeared in the Richmond Free Press throughout the debate. Between June of 1995 and January of 1996, more than thirty letters to the editor appeared in the Free Press on the subject of the Ashe debate. As a black owned and operated paper, the Free Press has a long-standing history as an alternative outlet for issues facing Richmond's African-American community. Its editor is known to monitor black city leaders, and the paper

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<sup>82</sup> Moutoussamy-Ashe A7.

<sup>83</sup> Harris.

often serves as a barometer of a powerful faction of black opinion in the city. In the words of one reader, "You are thoughtful. You are independent enough to give your critical views, never mind who is involved in the issue. What is more important is that the Free Press gives sensible answers to questions that confront us as a community."<sup>84</sup> While these letters to the editor include statements from white readers, they are most valuable because they provide insight into the black opinion on the Ashe debate within a primarily black venue.

Many of the letters that appeared in the Free Press echoed the official sentiment of the paper: that Ashe did not belong on Monument Avenue, that placing him there was disrespectful to his memory, and that the statue would be more suitably placed outside a sports hall of fame or beside the tennis courts on which he was not allowed to play. What is more telling about the letters is the way in which they suggest resentment towards the city government's handling of the matter. Overwhelmingly, writers indicated frustration that the city government's motivations were political and self-serving and not in the interest of Arthur Ashe or the African-American community as a whole: "They [the government] want to make a self-serving, political statement that will make Richmond an embarrassment

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<sup>84</sup> Cynthia Smith, letter, Richmond Free Press July 6-8, 1995. See Appendix C for a sampling of letters to the editor of the Free Press.

to the world,” one writer stated.<sup>85</sup> Another wrote, “With all the crime, unemployment and everything else going on in Richmond, city council should move on to something else and stop jockeying and positioning for the media. It does not – I repeat, does not – make the citizens look upon you favorably. . . . Poor Arthur is probably turning in his grave knowing that people in leadership are trying to force his presence on the avenue of Confederate white men.”<sup>86</sup> One writer summed up the frustration of many when she wrote, “Isn’t the purpose of the monument to honor Arthur Ashe and celebrate his ideals? Or is it to make a political point and rebuke the past?”<sup>87</sup>

Writers to the Free Press also reinforced the idea that city council was trying to sneak the Ashe statue onto the Richmond landscape without regard to public input. One wrote, “The Ashe statue site is a public issue that involves spending the taxpayers’ money. Therefore, the position of those who would want to ‘quietly’ place the statue without public input is unacceptable. A handful of selected people do not possess total knowledge about all issues that face our city.”<sup>88</sup> Another writer stated that “public opinion should have been invited long before this, so more of us could have been heard before a weary City Council rushed a decision. . . Council should

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<sup>85</sup> Bill Uhler, letter, Richmond Free Press June 29-July 1, 1995.

<sup>86</sup> Marie Wallace, letter, Richmond Free Press January 25-27, 1996.

<sup>87</sup> Robert Lynch, letter, Richmond Free Press August 17-19, 1995.

<sup>88</sup> Charlie Mason, letter, Richmond Free Press August 3-5, 1995.

have more faith in the public and worry less about world opinion, for it is the people of the neighborhood, city and region who will have to live with the decision.”<sup>89</sup>

Disappointment in black leaders was another common sentiment in the Free Press, increasing the tension between the government and its people. Put simply, citizens felt that city leaders were not speaking for the people when they appropriated DiPasquale’s Ashe statue: “Most disturbing are reports that some people in leadership roles in the black community would not recognize the negative aspect of placing a statue of Arthur Ashe near monuments of Rebel generals who fought to keep black people enslaved.”<sup>90</sup>

To say that all black Richmonders subscribed to the general worldview of the Free Press would be a misleading generalization. There were certainly some members of Richmond’s population whose voices were not heard in the newspapers or at the public hearing. Some black Richmonders simply did not actively engage in the media-led debate because, from their perspective, the issue was merely one manifestation of a larger pattern of racism with which they dealt on a daily basis. This faction of black Richmonders may have felt that their contribution to the Ashe controversy would not affect the reality of perilous race relations in

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<sup>89</sup> Lynch.

<sup>90</sup> Margaret Benton, letter, Richmond Free Press July 6-8, 1995.

Richmond and was thus not worth the energy.

Or, perhaps these citizens were engaged in a dialogue about the debate in ways that escaped media coverage. Various scholars have posited theories about how black Americans communicate with each other in ways that elude white ears. Patrick Hagopian argues that African Americans are able to speak and communicate on “a lower register” than whites can hear, an ability that derives directly from slavery. Furthermore, he argues that a black person might interpret his physical landscapes differently than a white person would the same landscape: “A world becomes full of sites where palpable feeling for those who live and die and suffer in it, so that ordinary places [to whites] become part of [the] commemorative mental maps [of blacks].”<sup>91</sup> Thus, a certain street corner in Jackson Ward, a particular jazz hall or church pew, or a specific voting booth might have much more commemorative meaning to a black Richmonder than any bronze figure.

As Hagopian points out, this sentiment is reinforced by Maya Angelou who writes, “If we [African Americans] were a people much given to revealing secrets, we might raise monuments and sacrifice to the memory

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<sup>91</sup> Patrick Hagopian, “Race and the Politics of Public History in the United States,” Keep Your Head to the Sky: Interpreting African American Home Ground, ed. Grey Gundaker (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1998) 285.

of our poets, but slavery cured us of that weakness.”<sup>92</sup> Thus, commemorations in the form of marble and stone hold little place in the minds and hearts of some black Americans. Perhaps, then, some black citizens of Richmond felt that Arthur Ashe’s inclusion on Monument Avenue had nothing to do with them. By refusing to involve themselves in the politics of the debate, this faction of Richmonders also seemed to disassociate itself from the appearance of racial tolerance attempted by the hegemonic structure.

Another level of the debate that was too uncomfortable to be openly discussed in the media was the fact that Ashe had died of AIDS, and that he had been a champion of AIDS-related causes before his death. The early 1990s marked the beginning of mainstream AIDS awareness and activism in the United States, and through the help of Time magazine’s influential cover stories, the surgeon general’s education initiative, and the Hollywood Red Ribbon campaign, American culture was becoming slowly aware and more terrified of this disease. The disclosure by famous people like Magic Johnson and Freddy Mercury that they had AIDS increased American awareness and fuelled stereotypes that AIDS was a disease of homosexuals, the sexually promiscuous, and intravenous drug users. At the same time, the deaths of everyday people like Ryan White, the teenager who was

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<sup>92</sup> Maya Angelou, I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings (New York: Random House, 1970) 127.

infected by a tainted blood transfusion, and Kimberly Bergalis, who was infected by her dentist, fuelled American fear that this disease could hit close to home.<sup>93</sup>

Despite education, fear and ignorance of AIDS was thriving when Arthur Ashe disclosed in 1992 that he had been infected with the disease. Though Ashe announced that he had been infected by a blood transfusion, rumors swirled that he was engaged in homosexual relationships and recreational drug use. No matter how the disease had been contracted or how accomplished the victim, being stricken with AIDS carried an incredible stigma. This issue was especially palpable to Paul DiPasquale, who cited the public's and the government's discomfort with Ashe's AIDS as the most significant opposition to his artwork.<sup>94</sup>

The government, which saw Ashe as perfect for the job of desegregating Monument Avenue in all other ways, dealt with Ashe's disease by disassociating him from it as much as possible. When DiPasquale presented his original model – one that Ashe's relatives had confirmed was a near perfect likeness of Ashe before his death – city officials and committees responded by criticizing the emaciated body mass and insisting that DiPasquale add weight and muscle until the figure looked

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<sup>93</sup> History of AIDS awareness taken from [www.avert.org](http://www.avert.org), the International AIDS Education and Medical Research Charity Web site, February 24, 2002.

<sup>94</sup> DiPasquale interview.

“more like a tennis champion.” DiPasquale acquiesced, but insisted on keeping Ashe’s facial features skeletal, as they were when he died.<sup>95</sup>

While Ashe’s AIDS was never overtly addressed in the press or in public circles, it certainly played a role in the public’s ability to embrace Ashe unconditionally as a hero. Some black Richmonders may have been reluctant, unconsciously or not, to have the social landscape of Richmond finally and ceremoniously altered by a figure who could open African Americans up to more stereotyping and racism by associating them with a disease commonly understood to be disgraceful, or sinful. To some white opponents, the fact that Ashe was not only a black man, but was one who died of AIDS, made him even more unfit to reside on Monument Avenue.

Of course, for other white people, the controversy was also inextricably connected to the issue of race. In general, most whites claimed that the conflict had little to do with Ashe’s commemorative worthiness; they felt instead that the inclusion of Ashe’s black figure on Monument Avenue would profoundly change Richmond’s public memory. Despite this sentiment, race was rarely discussed in open throughout the public debates. Time and again, the newspapers underscored that the issue was not about memorializing a black man, but rather about the idea of commemorating one on Monument Avenue. The opposition broke down to

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<sup>95</sup> DiPasquale interview.

one recurring issue: the idea that any addition to Monument Avenue would be “inappropriate.” The suggestion was that such a statue would threaten an accepted and enduring social reality that had been maintained and defended by white Southerners since before the Civil War.

Certainly, blacks would not experience the same sense that including Ashe on Monument Avenue threatened a distinguishing characteristic of Richmond’s history – a white history, an oppressive history. Kirk Savage offers a useful analysis of why whites – even those clearly in favor of commemorating Ashe in some way – might have reacted in this way:

Public monuments are the most conservative of commemorative forms precisely because they are meant to last, unchanged, forever. While other things come and go, are lost and forgotten, the monument is supposed to remain a fixed point, stabilizing both the physical and the cognitive landscape. Monuments attempt to mold a landscape of collective memory, to conserve what is worth remembering and discard the rest.<sup>96</sup>

The idea that monuments are “meant to last, unchanged, forever” is an important part of the Ashe statue debate. To opponents of the Ashe statue, the power of Monument Avenue lay not in its parts (the individual monuments) but rather in its sum. The Avenue itself was the ultimate monument to the Confederacy. Thus, placing a non-Confederate statue on the boulevard amounted to sacrilege. One Richmonder reinforced this point

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<sup>96</sup> Savage 4.

when he stated that the idea of placing a black man on the Avenue was “absurd. It’s a Confederate boulevard. It’s not about American history, it’s not about Civil War history, it’s Confederate history.”<sup>97</sup> Indeed, to some white Richmonders, this proposal threatened the “physical and cognitive landscape” that had been stabilizing their collective identity since 1890. In the midst of political and economic change, the Avenue had been “a fixed point” to which they could return for context and reference.<sup>98</sup>

Right or wrong, this imposing boulevard was a constant reminder of Confederate history. Of course, this was precisely the reason why the city government sought to desegregate the Avenue. The pre-Ashe boulevard promoted a social reality that was not conducive to the peaceful interracial coexistence that the new integrated governments were suppose to represent. Furthermore, the exclusively Confederate street suggested that the city must look to its sordid past in order to locate heroes, and that the only people worthy of such recognition were white. The Ashe monument offered an inclusive, modern-day hero representative of progress.

Invoking Vice Mayor Conrad’s idea of reconciling Richmond’s past with its future, Johnny Ashe stated, “It’s time for the city of Richmond to realize it has a future. It’s about time the city honored people who made a contribution we are experiencing now. . . Richmond has finally turned a

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<sup>97</sup> Harris.

<sup>98</sup> Savage 9.

page in history.”<sup>99</sup> As he watched his idea come to fruition, Governor Wilder said, “I feel more pride and relevance in being here on Monument Avenue than I have any time in my life, and that says it all. When the ground was broken, more than dirt was removed. The shell of our understanding was penetrated.”<sup>100</sup>

Leonidas Young concluded the dedication ceremony by saying that the addition of Ashe to Monument Avenue “proved” Richmond had completed its evolution. Aptly summarizing the agenda of the government, he stated that the monument “says we have reached a new social era in social affairs. It makes a positive statement about how people are able to get along.”<sup>101</sup>

At this, the government was left to sit back and wait for its implied social reality to take effect. Time has yet to tell if the physical alteration of Richmond’s public landscape can successfully alter the cognitive reality of its people.

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<sup>99</sup> Gordon Hickey, “A Monumental Change for the City,” Richmond Times-Dispatch July 9, 1996, A1.

<sup>100</sup> Atiya Bulter, “Richmond’s Other Heroes,” Forbes American Heritage September 1998, Web archive.

<sup>101</sup> Butler.

## CONCLUSION

Monument Avenue is not the only symbolic street in Richmond, Virginia. Other roadways, like Cary Street Road on which the Country Club of Virginia and numerous perfectly manicured mansions sit, or Second Street on which the broken heart of Jackson Ward remains, are powerful reminders of the complicated and divisive relationship between the races in Richmond. Black streets cut through black neighborhoods, and white streets cut through white neighborhoods. In the words of City Councilman Sa'ad El-Amin, "This is a city that is essentially two cities," one inhabited by whites and one inhabited by blacks. No statue of Arthur Ashe has been able to change that.

Even so, the Ashe statue has changed something. The monument, which was so awkwardly thrust upon the landscape, is meeting the objective of public art, if not the instant racial reconciliation that was hoped for. Since its erection in 1996, the statue has become an enormously popular destination for Richmonders and tourists alike. Whether driven by curiosity, approval, or disapproval, each person who visits the statue and considers it against the deep contrast of the Confederate monuments engages in the ongoing dialogue of how Arthur Ashe ended up on

Monument Avenue and what it all means. Thus, while the addition of the Ashe statue to Monument Avenue has not resulted in an automatic fusion of the race gap, it has spurred a dialogue that continues today. In the years since the monument was dedicated, the basic issues brought forth in the Ashe controversy have manifested themselves again and again in other debates. In 1999, a controversy erupted around decorative banners featuring regional history that were used in the dedication of the city's new Canal Walk.<sup>102</sup> One of the banners, which included a picture of a uniform-clad Robert E. Lee, was met with great resistance from some black residents and city council members. The debate, which was closely followed and reported by the media, became increasingly heated after an arsonist set fire to the banner in the middle of the night. A similar debate unfolded in 2000, when black city council members successfully proposed renaming two bridges, which served mostly black communities and were originally named after Civil War generals, for leaders of the Civil Rights movement.

Another issue that has been raised repeatedly since the Ashe debate is the possibility that the Richmond city government is inherently flawed because its mayor is appointed by city council, and not chosen by the people in a general election. Numerous articles have appeared in the Times-

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<sup>102</sup> Commemorative activity aside, Richmond's multi-million dollar Canal Walk was infused with emotion from its beginnings as much of the city's plan for downtown revitalization hinged upon its success.

Dispatch and the Free Press calling for the city to consider electing its mayor by the people. While the city is far from embracing this idea, the Ashe debate clearly illustrated the failure of the present system. It is difficult for citizens to embrace government initiatives that begin and end in a city council room, that limit hope of public debate and that elicit suspicion of all city officials. Being alienated from the quintessentially American right of elected representation is counterintuitive for people of a democratic society and culture.

These repeated arguments, foundations for which were first laid throughout the Ashe debate, may result in incremental growth for the city. The Ashe monument has changed the iconographical reality of Richmond, and the statue's permanency and visibility work towards keeping the issues from becoming dormant. As Paul DiPasquale has said, "Public art forces many societies and cultures to share one social and cultural environment. The dialogue – the forcing of buried issues – is a necessary part of the process. It's a good thing. Is it painful? Yes. Is it frustrating? Yes."<sup>103</sup> Though the process of making Richmond "one city" may have begun with the desegregation of Monument Avenue, serious work clearly remains. The dialogue must continue.

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<sup>103</sup> DiPasquale interview.

## EPILOGUE: QUESTIONS YET TO ANSWER

In Standing Soldiers, Kneeling Slaves: Race, War, and Monument in Nineteenth-Century America (1997), Kirk Savage writes, "One of the most urgent questions of our time is why racial animosity and inequality persist in a nation dedicated to the ideals of freedom and opportunity. Despite the Civil War, Reconstruction, the Civil Rights movement, and affirmative action, the division between white and black seems intractable as ever. To understand why, we must go beyond history of politics and policy. We need a history of consciousness as well. We need to examine the inner life of culture as well as the external events that shape it."<sup>104</sup> There is no community for which this is truer than Richmond.

In his text, Savage not only identifies race as a key factor shaping the way in which a society interacts with its monuments, he also points out how that role has been under-investigated. This approach has vast implications for the theories of oppositional forces because it acknowledges that the "inner life of culture" is not a static article, but is rather a series of fluid and dimensional cohorts. Much work is to be done on the "history of consciousness" as it pertains to monumentality in America.

Furthermore, while John Bodnar's theory reminds us that most

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<sup>104</sup> Savage 210.

scholars have accepted public sculptures as tangible products of debate, few have adequately addressed the discursive way in which monuments (as both ideas and actual objects) interact with the viewing public. The process by which an idea becomes a monument involves a complicated discourse among culturally different groups within one society, not just a struggle between two opposing forces. The resulting monument is a single inert symbol that does not simply extol the one intended (or purported) message but fluidly delivers meaning on various frequencies. How each subgroup actively (as well as passively) engages with a commemorative piece dictates its actual meaning to that group. Thus, while the government-versus-its-people dichotomy does offer significant insight into the evolution of a monument, Bodnar's explanation belies the complexity of the process by ignoring the nuances within groups of a given population.

Bodnar's work also demonstrates that scholarship on public memory and its relation to public sculpture in the late twentieth- and early twenty-first-century is in its infancy, and that recent commemorative efforts raise their own unique sets of questions. How have the priorities we assign to monumentality changed, and how do these changes affect what appears in our public spaces? As society becomes more pluralistic and diversity more celebrated, how can the "people" continue to be described as a singular group when we are in fact a dynamic society of cultures, each interpreting

our histories and our surroundings in dramatically different ways? When considered in this more sophisticated way, how do the conflicts rectify themselves? These are the kinds of questions that need to be considered as scholarship on public memory and sculpture moves forward.

## APPENDIX A: IMAGES

IMAGE I: ARTHUR ASHE MONUMENT (DETAIL)



**IMAGE II: ARTHUR ASHE MONUMENT**



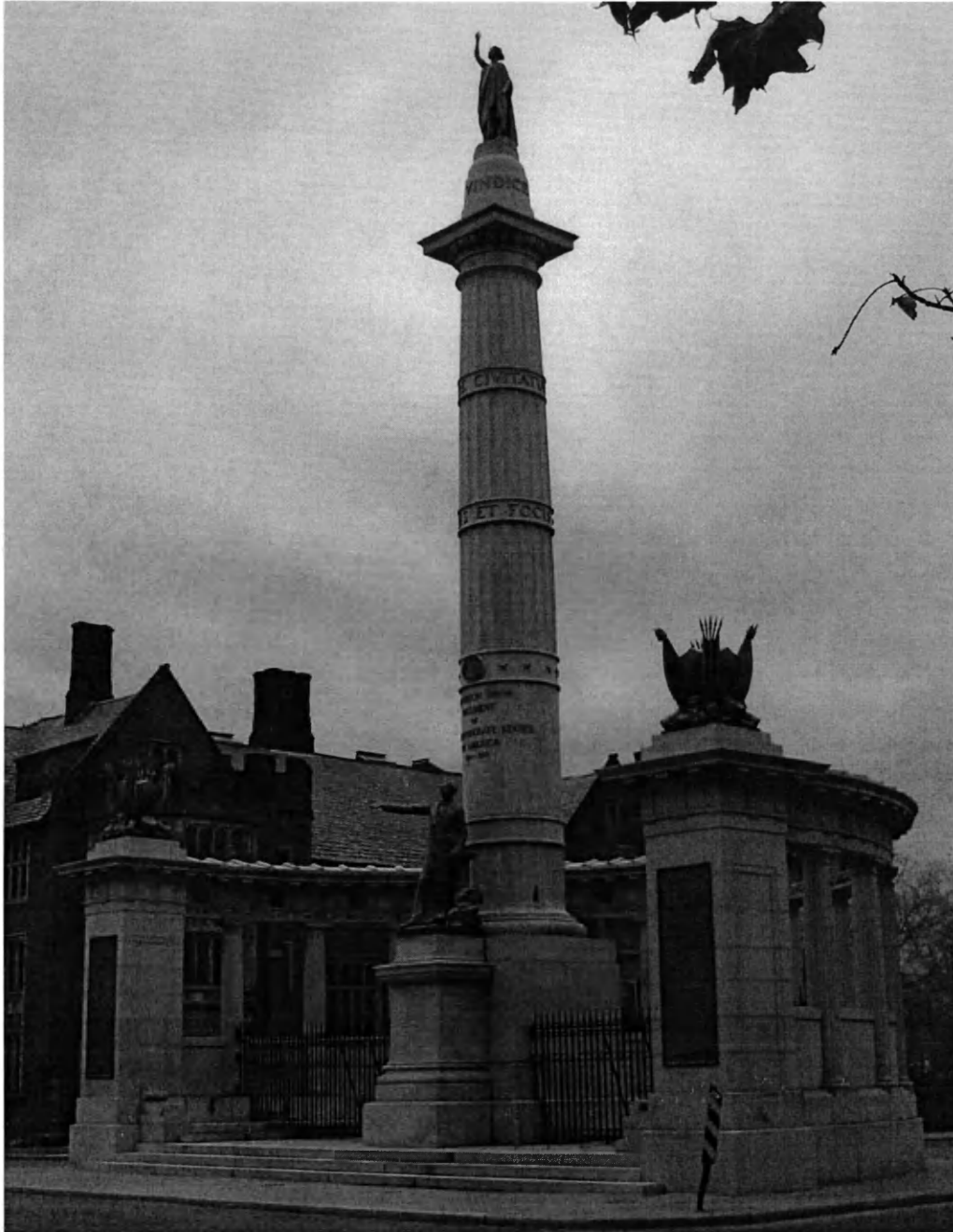
**IMAGE III: J. E. B. STUART MONUMENT**



IMAGE IV: ROBERT E. LEE MONUMENT



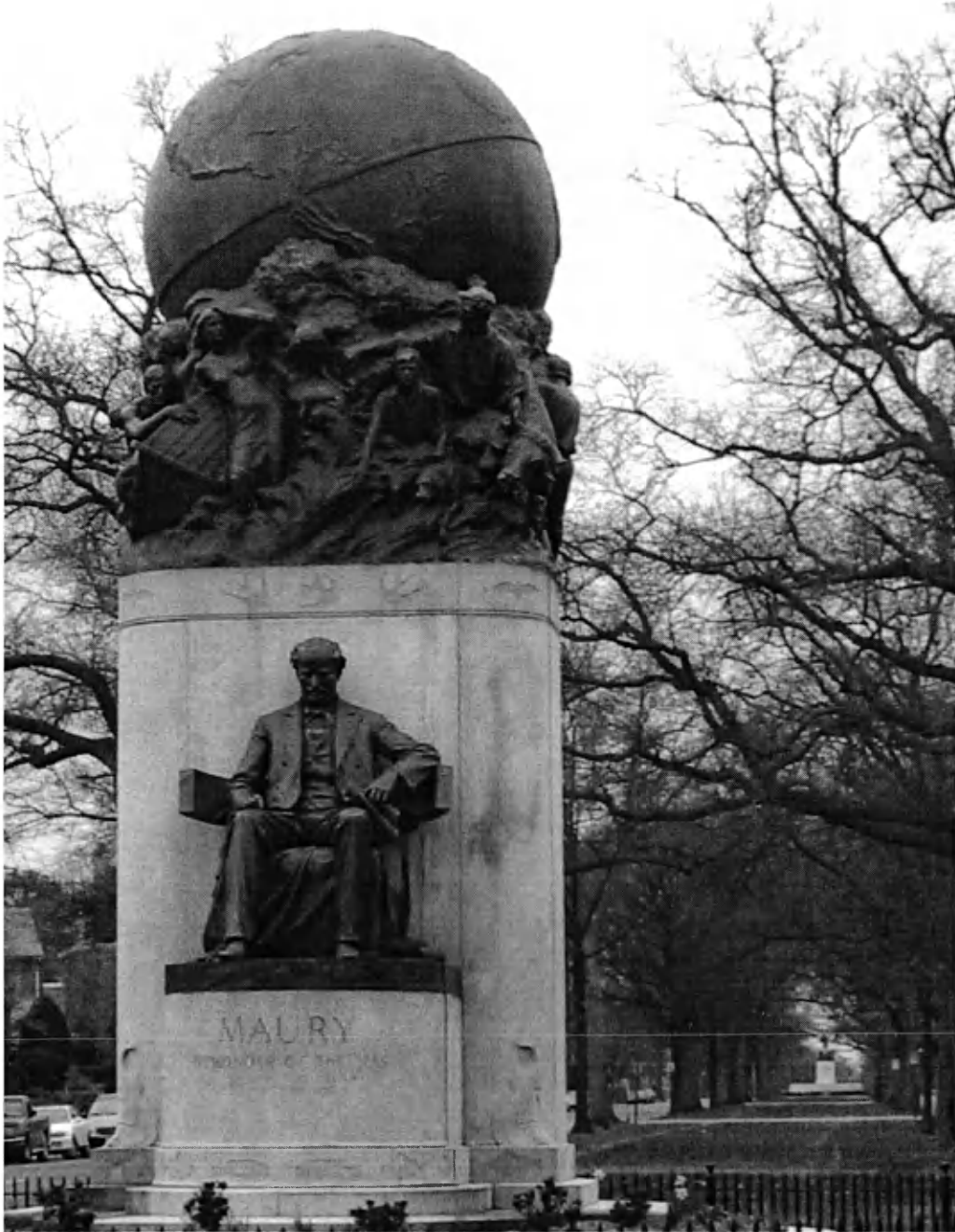
IMAGE V: JEFFERSON DAVIS MONUMENT



**IMAGE VI: STONEWALL JACKSON MONUMENT**



IMAGE VII: MATTHEW FONTAINE MAURY MONUMENT



**IMAGE VIII: PORTION OF ORIGINAL CORRIDOR**



**IMAGE IX: ANNEX**



## APPENDIX B: SURVEY RESULTS<sup>105</sup>

Of the 415 adults who responded, 95 percent said they heard about the controversy surrounding the Ashe monument. Those who were aware of the debate broke down into the following demographic categories:

Age	Sex	Race	Education
25% – Older than 55	46% Male	26% Black	10% – less than high school
38% – 35 to 54	54% Female	74% White	53% – high school degree
37% – 18 to 34			38% – college or graduate degree

Of those people, the following was true:

In Favor of Monument Avenue Site	Against Monument Avenue Site	Undecided
33%	53%	13%

The Times-Dispatch poll is based on telephone interviews with 415 men and woman 18 or older who live in the Richmond area. It was conducted February 12 through 27, 1996.

The telephone numbers were selected using a random sampling method. The poll was conducted by the research department of Media General, Incorporated, publisher of the Times-Dispatch.

<sup>105</sup> Gordon Hickey, "Liking the Work, Not the Place; Many Don't Back Site on Monument," Richmond Times-Dispatch March 4, 1996, Area/State, p. A1.

**Appendix C: Selected Letters to the Editor,  
*Richmond Free Press***

Since I first discovered Monument Avenue and recognized its significance, I have been offended by what it represents.

How could modern-day people pay homage to these men who were traitors to their country? How do black people feel about honoring people who fought to preserve slavery? I have always resented the implications connected to this street.

I have been discussing the subject of Arthur Ashe's statue with a number of people and feel that probably the most intelligent people in the area are offended by the idea of placing his monument at the selected location. The picture of a row of Civil War "heroes" down Monument Avenue, followed by a statue of a dignified, quiet, private person holding a tennis racket and some books is ludicrous. Arthur Ashe was a true hero to Richmonders, Virginians, Americans and the world. It is obvious that the same "out-of-touch" mentality that brought us 6<sup>th</sup> Street Marketplace, Main Street Station and other fiascos is as it again. They want to make a self-serving, political statement that will make Richmond an embarrassment to the world.

When I saw you [editor of the Free Press] on TV, I was pleased to see someone who wields some measure of influence in the area make a statement against this action.

I hope to see the family of Mrs. Ashe made aware of the harm that is being done. I hope to see the people of the area given an opportunity to express their opinions.

Richmonders are waiting for someone to start a protest and not let the City Hall "boneheads" do such harm to the memory of a truly great man. People all over the world know Arthur Ashe. Who outside the Richmond area honors "Stonewall" Jackson?

Bill Uhler

Richmond, June 29-July 1, 1995

[Richmond] should move away from its tendency to lock itself in the past. Most disturbing are reports that some people in leadership roles in the black community would not recognize the negative aspect of placing a statue of Arthur Ashe near monuments of Rebel generals who fought to keep black people enslaved.

Margaret Benton  
Richmond, July 6-8, 1995

Where the Arthur Ashe statue is placed in Richmond is really not important in the scheme of things.

The wave of significant developments impacting on the nation indicates that the Old South is rising again.

Do we not see what's going on in Washington—in the Newt Gingrich Congress and the Supreme Court with another loser, Clarence Thomas? It's the same ugly story in Richmond with Governor Allen.

Tyson Carter  
Richmond, July 6-8, 1995

. . .Erecting an Ashe memorial on Monument Avenue would not only offend the legacy of the great tennis star and humanitarian, but also the legacy of John Mitchell, the courageous, militant editor of the black-owned Richmond Planet. . . .

Vincent Harris  
Richmond, July 6-8, 1995

. . . I applaud the Free Press approach in the way it offers constructive criticism. You are thoughtful. You are independent enough to give your critical views, never mind who is involved in the issue. What is more important is that the Free Press gives sensible answers to questions that confront us as a community.

Cynthia Smith  
Midlothian, July 6-8, 1995

. . . While the decision of where to put our favorite native son's statue has divided some of us along racial lines, it has also helped affirm for some of us our commitment to racial unity.

The bottom line for me is that wherever the statue ends up will be OK. What won't be OK is if we let this divide us, again. . .

Suzy Peebles Bonham  
Richmond, August 3-5, 1995

Thanks to the Free Press for standing for a public hearing on the proposed Arthur Ashe statue on Monument Avenue.

The Ashe statue site is a public issue that involves spending the taxpayers' money. Therefore, the position of those who would want to "quietly" place the statue without public input is unacceptable. A handful of selected people do not possess total knowledge about all issues that face our city.

I also appreciate that you reminded us about the relationship between our monuments and our values and how Confederate statues on Monument Avenue do not deserve a hero status. They should be isolated and highlighted as negative, ugly examples of history. They are not models for the future.

Charlie Mason  
Richmond, August 3-5, 1995

In regard to Richmond City Council's decision to erect a statue of Arthur Ashe on Monument Avenue, I feel that if council members could just stand back and view this decision with a little more objectivity, they would realize just how out of place the statue is going to look.

This avenue is dedicated to an era during the 19<sup>th</sup> century pertaining to heroes of the Confederacy, not sports figures of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century.

If black versus white is the issue here, as it appears to be, why not place a monument to a black Confederate soldier for the people of the city to honor? There would be absolutely no contest to this proposal as it would be most appropriate.

We, the white population, would object to a statue of one of America's most famous sports figures — Babe Ruth being erected on Monument Avenue — simply because it would not fit the criteria, which are solely Confederate-related memorials.

I think City Council, especially Chuck Richardson, has turned this into a strictly racial issue, as he appears to be truly racially motivated. Mr. Richardson's priority should be what is best for the city, not his own personal views.

Celeste Cook  
Ringgold, August 17-19, 1995

. . . Some people at the public meeting said they were saddened by the debate. I saw this open debate and citizen input as healthy, healing and necessary. But, I think public opinion should have been invited long before this, so more of us could have been heard before a weary City Council rushed a decision.

The hurry to decide on a location for the Ashe monument and the rush to break ground before funds are raised are unwise.

Council should have more faith in the public and worry less about world opinion, for it is the people of the neighborhood, city and region who will have to live with the decision.

I fully support keeping the issue alive and fully exploring all the possibilities. Rather than placing the Arthur Ashe monument in a location where an artificial comparison will be invited between the hopes of today and the dreams of yesteryear, the statue should be given a unique spot where Mr. Ashe's character and accomplishments will stand on their own.

Isn't the purpose of the monument to honor Arthur Ashe and celebrate his ideals? Or is it to make a political point and rebuke the past?

Robert Lynch  
Richmond, August 17-19, 1995

I cannot believe there is still controversy surrounding the placement of the Arthur Ashe statue.

. . . City Council members have not spoken for me on this issue, nor have they spoken for a lot of us. I am an African American and take great pride in my heritage.

But enough is enough. I was born and raised in Richmond and to this day – and I am 53 years old – Monument Avenue, with all its Confederate Civil War heroes on horseback looking down on me, gives me the creeps.

Monument Avenue is fine for these figures. But someone like Arthur — a sports hero, a man of great character — should be memorialized with something more in line with his life's work: tennis. Don't just stick him on the avenue because it's the politically correct thing to do and because you can do it.

If the African-American people in the city want a hero of African-American heritage on Monument, commission an artist to make a sculpture of one of the 12 black soldiers who were awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor in 1854 for bravery in securing New Market Road.

With all the crime, unemployment and everything else going on in Richmond, City Council should move on to something else and stop jockeying and positioning for the media. It does not — I repeat, does not — make the citizens look upon you favorably.

. . . Poor Arthur is probably turning in his grave knowing that people in leadership are trying to force his presence on the avenue of Confederate white men.

Marie Wallace  
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