

## Civil War Monuments: Mourning and Terror

Jeffrey Frank

*St. Lawrence University*

The 2019 PES annual meeting marked an anniversary, the 75th of our organization. The city of Richmond where we gathered also just celebrated its own anniversary. Richmond was the capital of the Confederate States of America. If our meeting was held here a little over 150 years ago, we'd be together in a different country.

My article responds to these twin anniversaries by exploring how the Civil War is memorialized. Though much recent debate centers on the status of Confederate monuments, I take a different approach. Following the lead of philosophers Jonathan Lear and Arthur Danto, I focus on Gettysburg.<sup>1</sup> I focus on Gettysburg. Lear and Danto are differently skeptical of how Gettysburg has been memorialized. Lear discusses how Lincoln's address at Gettysburg makes mourning the Confederate dead impossible and explores the ongoing significance of this failure to mourn, including its relevance for the debate over confederate monuments. Danto argues that the iconic Union monument found in many town centers in the North hides the industrial violence of modern warfare that continues to haunt us. What I find important about both philosophical approaches is the way they bring to light aspects of an issue that are hidden in plain sight. Countless American students learn to recite the Gettysburg address as a settled and positive moment in their history, just as countless people walk by Union monuments without giving them much thought. Though we intensely debate the significance of how the Civil War is memorialization in the South, by focusing our attention back north, philosophy finds a way to reanimate key assumptions of that debate. Considering how philosophy can reanimate a central educational debate—the significance of Civil War memorialization—strikes me as a good way to mark the continuing significance of philosophy of education at this point in our history. I return to this point directly in the final section.

## MONUMENTS AND MOURNING

Jonathan Lear invites his reader to imagine what an unburied dead Confederate soldier might hear while listening to Abraham Lincoln's address at Gettysburg. As Lincoln speaks, a massive effort is underway. The hastily buried dead of Gettysburg are being disinterred and carefully separated. Union dead are in the process of being laid to rest at the cemetery Lincoln is there to dedicate. The Confederate dead, outside that hallowed ground, are awaiting their shipment south.

Imagining the Gettysburg address from this angle, we are called to remember that Lincoln's speech was given in the middle of the war, while death was still very alive to the combatants. The Gettysburg Address, decontextualized, a speech memorized by children who haven't had time to study the war, is often taken to be a rousing call to bring a divided nation together. But, as Lear reminds us by asking us to envision the Confederate dead outside the cemetery where Lincoln is speaking, the Gettysburg address was not a gesture toward reconciliation. Far from it. It was a demand that Northerners rededicate themselves to the cause of preserving the Union, so that the Union dead at Gettysburg will not have died in vain.

It is a difficult place to be there, outside the cemetery as Lincoln speaks.<sup>2</sup> Born an American, now Confederate-American, with children and a wife who will eventually become American again. Lincoln doesn't want your killers to have died in vain, so that your wife and children might experience a new birth of freedom as Americans. It is deeply disorienting to be in that space. Lear writes, in reference to the Confederate dead awaiting their transit south:

Our modes of memorializing the dead tend in the direction of celebrating them—of honoring, glorifying, and idealizing them. We are deficient in modes of mourning that publicly acknowledge that these dead count as part of us—and that we thus have responsibilities to take them into account even if we do not want to honor them.<sup>3</sup>

Can we mourn the Confederate dead, even if we don't celebrate them or the

cause of slavery and the racial caste system that some explicitly gave their life to preserve?<sup>4</sup> Is it possible, for the sake of their parents or children who awake again as Americans in 1865 after four years as citizens of an enemy nation, to mourn these dead without honoring a defense of injustice?

Lear writes, “If we only knew one fact about a man, that he fought and died on the Confederate side at Gettysburg, how could we possibly be in a position to judge the meaningfulness of his life?”<sup>5</sup> Lear is asking us to “take a Sabbath rest from the weekday practices of praise and blame” and ask what it means to feel something in the face of devastation, death and destruction.<sup>6</sup> His concern is that we bury *our* dead and memorialize their virtue so that we can close the door on the Civil War. If we tried to mourn the Confederate dead, then we may be forced to continue asking questions of Northern complicity in the institution of slavery and the ways in which racism will become *our* problem, not something we can continue to blame on the South. Lear writes, “I want to suggest that the problem of *the unburied Confederate dead not being a problem* indicates that all is not well with the conceptual and imaginative resources with which we experience reality and its difficulties.”<sup>7</sup> Lacking the resources to experience reality and its difficulties, we become locked in counter-memorialization: the South celebrating the “lost cause” that becomes impossible to separate from the racism that perpetuated the slave system, and the North taking pride in their ultimate virtue that casts any attempt to remember the Confederate dead as regressive and racist.<sup>8</sup>

Not far from where we are today stands Hollywood Cemetery. Ten years after the battle of Gettysburg, on October 11th, 1873, the final shipment of Confederate soldiers was finally delivered to Richmond. At “Hollywood Cemetery 2,935 men are interned[,] 313 identified and 2,622 unknown.”<sup>9</sup> Lear wants us to consider what we would do if we were in the place of Confederate mourners. He imagines Lincoln as Creon—acknowledging the ways he was most certainly not a tyrant—and Southern women receiving their dead as Antigone, writing:

What the Southern Antigones held in common with the Northern Creons was an imaginative field in which the only

adequate forms of memorialization necessarily included celebration, glorification, and idealization. Not only did each graveyard give occasion for resentment against the North, each provided a focus for glorifying the nobility and ideals of the “lost cause.”<sup>10</sup>

Lear’s analysis demonstrates how the debate over Confederate statuary is deeply fraught in ways we often fail to consider. Even if we know that many Confederate monuments were built long after the end of the Civil War and often as a means to intimidating black Americans, Lear’s thought that the idealization of the “lost cause” may also have its roots in our collective inability to find a way to mourn without glorification is worth consideration. Lear is very clearly not asking us to glorify the Confederate dead, especially at the expense of perpetuating injustice. Rather, as he writes, “The question is whether there is room in our culture to develop shared forms of mourning that hold in abeyance—and thus give us some relief from—our normal practices of assigning praise and blame.”<sup>11</sup> Can we bracket our concern with the blameworthiness of fighting as a Confederate long enough to consider how to mourn that soldier’s death?

The possibility of mourning may not be a live one for all of Lear’s readers, but the implications of Lear’s analysis for education are significant nonetheless. First, I appreciate how Lear causes us to rethink the meaning of the Gettysburg Address. Reading the address as a triumphant call to reunite the Union allows us to forget what Lincoln was actually doing in the address while keeping us from understanding how the address would’ve been received by the living relations of the Confederate dead. Developing an understanding of the address freed from the spirit of idealization allows us to also appreciate why Southerners may feel thrust into the role of Antigone and why debates around Confederate monuments are anything but simple. Second, Lear’s thinking may free students to take a sabbath from judgment. Living in the polarized time that we do, it can be hard not to fall into the idealization/demonization trap Lear describes. Though we do have to judge and act on our judgments, we might also take a break from judgment, opening ourselves up to the difficult experience of mourning. We can mourn the fact that we are divided from our neighbor, even

as we continue to advocate for the causes that keep us divided. We can mourn the fact that so many Americans make decisions based on fear.<sup>12</sup> We can mourn the fact the Me Too and Black Lives Matter movements inspire anger and not a desire to practice radical empathy.<sup>13</sup> We need to prepare young people to act based on their best-informed and wholehearted beliefs—to be upstanders for their sense of what is right—but we should not foreclose, maybe even encourage, opportunities for mourning, even if we find ourselves mourning for someone we might otherwise consider evil or an enemy.<sup>14</sup>

Noting all of this, I find myself outside of Lear's thinking in two important ways.<sup>15</sup> First, the Gettysburg Lincoln address is not the Gettysburg we visit today. There are Confederate statues and ample opportunities to mourn Confederate dead there now. As Danto notes in his reading of the battlefield, a visitor can walk the Union and Confederate lines as if they were walking the Stations of the Cross.<sup>16</sup> Thus, a Civil War battlefield may be the space to debate how we can mourn Confederate dead without memorializing their cause, not a city center or a college campus where debate may be inappropriate. We can still agree with Lear about the need to mourn, while being far more aware of the continuing hurt that memorial tributes to the Confederacy cause than Lear seems to be. Though I can see why Lear doesn't want us to lump all Confederates or advocates for Confederate memorials into a "basket of deplorables," his engagement with the difficulties of reality may remove him too far from the realities of racial injustice and its continuing significance.<sup>17</sup> This leads to my second point. I feel uncomfortable with the idea of mourning the Confederate dead without a consideration of mourning the deaths and soul deaths caused by the very institution of slavery Confederates fought to preserve.<sup>18</sup>

Just as Lear is responding to the mistake of lumping a group of people into a basket of deplorables, I find myself responding to an equally mistaken counter response to this problem, the problem that philosopher Kate Manne describes as *himpathy*. Manne describes the phenomenon as: "the inappropriate and disproportionate sympathy powerful men often enjoy in cases of sexual assault, intimate partner violence, homicide and other misogynistic behavior."<sup>19</sup> I worry that something similar occurs when we extend sympathy to the "lost

cause” of the Confederacy. By focusing on the white pain caused by the Civil War and its aftermath, we lose sight of the black bodies terrorized by the slave system.

It is a difficulty of reality to envision the Confederate dead excluded from Lincoln’s address while he awaits his transit south to Hollywood, but when he did arrive in Hollywood, he was given a hero’s welcome and the memory of his cause and the idealization of his valor survives to this day. What about the slaves who served that same Confederate soldier and his family? Do we know where they are buried? What about the children that soldier may have forced upon his slaves? Do we care about their place in our Union and do we mourn the deaths of their children? Though we may want to mourn the Confederate dead without memorializing them, can we mourn and memorialize dead slaves without provoking a violent counter-response from Confederate descendants? The fact that slaves built this country and their descendants continue to keep the ideals of America alive through hope is something worth celebrating, regardless of how angry it makes the intolerant.<sup>20</sup> That may be too strong a way of making the point, but it is not reverse racism to assert the need for monuments that allow us to think deeply about slavery even as we seek to remove memorializations of the racist spirit that runs through much Confederate iconography. Our students need to understand why this is not reverse racism or anything like it, and Lear’s mourning of the Confederate dead can confuse this point unless it is taught very carefully.

I think with Lear not so I can criticize him, but because his philosophical analysis of Gettysburg, particularly his thinking on how the Gettysburg Address is taught, pushes us to think about ethical issues of teaching the debate over Confederate monuments in what I take to be profoundly helpful ways, maybe especially as I try to articulate where my sense of mourning takes me away from the dead Confederate and to the generations of enslaved men and women who we also fail to mourn. If mourning the Confederate dead without memorializing their cause allows us to begin mourning slavery in schools and our broader culture, then Lear will have done us a great service.

## MONUMENTS TO TERROR

Where Jonathan Lear explores our refusal to mourn the Confederate dead, Danto asks us to consider what is memorialized through Union statuary. He moves the debate of Civil War monuments from the south to the north, and the results are profoundly unsettling. Danto begins his article stating: “The standard Civil War memorial, for example, is artistically banal by almost any criterion, and yet I am subject to pity-and-terror whenever I reflect upon the dense ironies it embodies.”<sup>21</sup> Even though these memorials to the Union pale in comparison, aesthetically, to our great tragedies, Danto is moved by the sight of these near identical monuments, which dot the landscape of the American North, especially the villages of New England.



Fig. 1: Memorial in Canton, New York (Photo: Jeffrey Frank, 2018).

Before developing Danto’s argument, I offer some context. Above is an image of the memorial found in the village green where I live and teach. Though there is nothing particularly compelling, aesthetically, about this type of monument, I am moved when I walk by it, but not—until I read Danto—by

pity-and-terror. Instead, I feel the pride of the Gettysburg Address as I envision men and boys leaving far upstate New York to risk their lives for the Union. When the monument is buried in deep snow with weather that hasn't been above freezing for over two months, and as I pass by thinking about the injustices that bombard me and cause me deep concern, the simple statue somehow gives me heart. Thinking about the commitment so many made to fight and die for this experiment in democracy provokes admiration and strengthens me to resist injustice and rededicate myself to the ideals of this nation so that the deaths of the memorialized soldiers are not in vain.

Lear cautions against this feeling—lest it turn into vilification of the Confederate dead that still haunts our politics and idealization that glosses over the imperfections of our Union—and Danto asks us to *look* at the soldier before letting ourselves wander into the realm of ideals. Danto, an Army veteran familiar with weaponry, looks at the Union monuments and sees the “tragedy inherent in the terrible juxtaposition of the most deadly armaments and ordnance known up to that time, with what, under those conditions, was the most vulnerably clad soldiery in history.”<sup>22</sup> I find this analysis arresting. The Union soldier on the town green looks like someone going out for a walk and Danto wants us to appreciate that vulnerability, especially when it is juxtaposed with his rifle, a rifle so advanced that its design remains virtually unchanged when it is given to soldiers in the first world war. This weapon is terribly accurate and effective at killing, but the Union soldier—unlike his counterpart in the first war who has trenches and helmets—meets the rifle-fire of the enemy in a foraging cap and wool jacket.

The Civil War soldier is engaged in our first modern war, but all he has to protect himself from his enemy is a light jacket. Nowhere does the terror of this juxtaposition become clearer than at Gettysburg. Danto argues that there is nothing of value to the site of the battle, and that the battle could've easily been avoided. But the armies met there, and the result was the greatest loss of life in a single Civil War battle: 50,000 men dead. And, nowhere was the terror of warfare more apparent than in Pickett's charge, where 12,500 Confederates—protected only by their jackets—rushed headlong into the canon and rifle fire

of the Union, leaving over half the attackers dead. This terror is what Danto sees when he looks at Civil War monuments in the North, writing:

It was in Pickett's grand charge up the slopes of Cemetery Ridge that the tragic contradiction between arms and uniform became palpable. Pickett's superb veterans, fresh in this battle, marched according to a magnificent code into a wall of fire. It was the brutal end to an era of warfare, the last massed charge. The triumph of slaughter over chivalry gave rise to Sherman's horrifying march through Georgia and South Carolina, to total war, to the fire-bombing of Dresden, to Hiroshima and Nagasaki, to the rolled grenade in the full jetliner.<sup>23</sup>

Danto's leap from Gettysburg to nuclear war to the work of terrorists may feel too quick, but I find it illuminating. Once we use the full destructive power of modern weaponry against men dressed as if on a walk, it is not terribly hard to see why the line between civilian and soldier became blurred in ways that ushered in the terrorism of Sherman's march and an era of total war.

Danto doesn't engage in the debate over Confederate statuary, but he very strongly calls into question my feelings of constitutional patriotism in the face of Union memorials.<sup>24</sup> Instead of debating whether or not we should memorialize the dead, Danto asks us to consider what it is we are memorializing. North and South we have men standing with rifle at rest or atop horse gazing out. What they stand witness to, according to Danto, is not the righteousness of their cause. Rather, they stand at the threshold of total war. The soldiers surveying our village greens are not looking out in dedication to the ideals of their cause, they face the full force of industrial warfare dressed like you and me.

Though Danto does not go here, I would argue that this is an insight that needs to find a way into our curriculum. The fog of the ideal hangs around the Civil War and how it is taught in schools, and more needs to be done to clear up this haze, because—as Danto and Lear so persuasively show—the war haunts

America into the present. Instead of thinking only about who is “right” in the debate over statuary, we may also wonder whether we fully appreciate what we are memorializing with these statues. Are we enshrining more than we imagine and does this cause us untold pain in the present? Do we know the full extent of what we are teaching when we teach the debate over Confederate statues or when we have a group of students memorize the Gettysburg Address? Given the usefulness of philosophy as a lens to investigate these types of educational questions—as Lear and Danto very clearly demonstrate in their articles—shouldn’t philosophy’s importance for education be more widely recognized than it currently is?

#### HIDDEN IN PLAIN SIGHT

Lear and Danto show us the power of philosophy to reanimate a significant educational debate by allowing us to see aspects of this debate in ways we cannot appreciate without looking at it through a philosophical lens. Though this is not the only mode that philosophical work can take, it is a type of work I find particularly pertinent for philosophers of education. At our 75th anniversary, I am reminded of the groundbreaking thinking of Philip Jackson.<sup>25</sup> Jackson did not *apply* philosophy to educational problems, he did not aim to use the tools of philosophical analysis to clear up conceptual confusions. Rather, Jackson sat in the back of classrooms and appreciated what was right there, hidden in plain sight. He didn’t need to immerse himself in the world of theory to appreciate the ways in which a hidden curriculum operates in our schools. I don’t mean to be snide here, but Jackson’s discovery of the hidden curriculum—and the philosophical method that brought it to light—is ripe for reclamation by the field that gave it to educational thought.<sup>26</sup> Philosophy of education is often criticized for being apolitical or for not being political enough, but Jackson’s thinking on the hidden curriculum is an excellent example of how work that starts philosophically can offer ideas and concepts that can be mobilized politically. A problem we face as philosophers of education is that scholars who take up the idea of the hidden curriculum have effaced and erased its origins, and use the very concept of the hidden curriculum to marginalize

philosophers of education.

It would take a different type of article to develop this line of thinking. I state it here to remind us of a prominent example of how philosophical thinking matters for education and a sense for the resources that we have in our history. Education, every aspect of educating, is philosophical and benefits from the insights of philosophers of education. I hope we can take the occasion of this anniversary to continue thinking about all the ways we can bring this to light. Just as the resources of philosophy help bring to consciousness what is hidden in plain sight, I think a philosophical lens helps us appreciate how we are often hidden in plain sight in schools of education and the colleges where we work and teach. Again, it would take an entire article or a special committee meeting to develop the thought, but I wonder what it would take to empower philosophers of education to become better advocates for their work. The process of becoming socialized into a tenure system can encourage staying hidden until one can speak with full voice post-tenure, and philosophers of education routinely discuss our waning influence in educational conversations. But I wonder how we can be seen as resources in debates central to schools of education. Not so we can sort them out like philosopher kings, but so that we might—like I try to do with Danto and Lear here—reanimate them in ways that create new possibilities for dialogue and deepened appreciation for the importance of philosophy of education.

We are at a moment in history when the pressure to act politically is palpable. What can get lost in a pressure-filled system is the need for philosophy. Though it may be right and important to tear Confederate statues down, if we don't appreciate the broadest philosophical impact of that action, we will continue to live with the climate that made those statues as necessary to some as they are offensive to others. I see something similar happening in educational research, practice and policy. In the pressure to make a decision between fixed alternatives, we lose the opportunity to reanimate the very terms of the decision and we often don't think enough about the broad philosophical significance of the decision. Here I especially see a future for philosophers of education. We are uniquely positioned to make the fixed terms of debates in educational

literatures and policy-making fluid and more expansive. If we are successful in doing this, if we can bring to light what is hidden in plain sight, we make the good of our work more visible, and this—in turn—can encourage the next generation of philosophers of education to find their place and their voice as a conversation partner and co-worker in the worlds of educational research, practice and policy. My hope, at our 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary, is that we can rededicate ourselves to the task of building a future where our voices do not perish from conversations that keep the expansive promise of education alive.

1 Jonathan Lear, “Gettysburg Mourning,” *Critical Inquiry* 45, no. 1 (2018): 97-121; Arthur Danto, “Gettysburg,” *Grand Street* 6, no. 3 (1987): 98-116.

2 Though I don’t have the space to go into the point here, Lear draws heavily on Cora Diamond’s thinking on the difficulty of reality drawn from her essay, “The Difficulty of Reality and the Difficulty of Philosophy,” *Partial Answers* 1, no. 2 (2003): 1–26.

3 Lear, “Mourning,” 109.

4 For a discussion of these realities, see Isabel Wilkerson, *Warmth of Other Suns* (New York: Vintage, 2010) and Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow* (New York: New Press, 2010).

5 Lear, “Mourning,” 113.

6 *Ibid.*, 118.

7 *Ibid.*, 115.

8 For an excellent discussion of how the North and the South have failed to contend with the difficulties of the Civil War and how it continues to matter, see Robert Penn Warren, *The Legacy of the Civil War* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1998) and David Blight, *Race and Reunion* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001).

9 <https://gettysburgcompiler.org/2012/08/16/bury-them-in-peace-by-allie-ward/>

10 Lear, “Mourning,” 116.

11 *Ibid.*, 118.

12 For an excellent recent discussion of this, see Martha Nussbaum, *Monarchy of Fear* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2018).

13 When I think of radical empathy, I think of the work of Isabel Wilkerson and her discussion of this concept in an interview with Krista Tippet available [here](https://onbeing.org/programs/isabel-wilkerson-the-heart-is-the-last-frontier-nov2016/): <https://onbeing.org/programs/isabel-wilkerson-the-heart-is-the-last-frontier-nov2016/>.

14 For a practical discussion of the concept of being an upstander, see Harvey Daniels and Sara Ahmed, *Upstanders* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2015).

15 I am grateful to Kiley Frank for pushing me to more fully articulate these objections and suggesting lines of response.

16 Danto, "Gettysburg," 114.

17 Lear, "Mourning," 114. Here he is clearly echoing remarks Hilary Clinton made about supporters of Donald Trump.

18 On the concept of soul murder, see Nell Irwin Painter, *Soul Murder and Slavery* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 1995).

19 See her *New York Times* editorial: <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/09/26/opinion/brett-kavanaugh-hearing-himpathy.html>.

20 Here we can think especially of the Civil Rights movement, see Vincent Harding, *There is a River* (Orlando, FL: Harcourt Brace, 1981).

21 Danto, "Gettysburg," 98.

22 *Ibid.*, 98.

23 *Ibid.*, 111.

24 For an excellent discussion of constitutional patriotism, see Jan-Werner Muller, *Constitutional Patriotism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007).

25 Though I primarily refer to his *Life in Classrooms* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1990) here, much of his work exhibits the virtues celebrated here. For another discussion of Jackson's continuing significance, see Jeff Frank, "Bound to the Mimetic or the Transformative? Considering Other Possibilities," *Education and Culture* 33, no. 1 (2017): 23-40.

26 To take one example, maybe an unhelpful one, the Wikipedia entry on the hidden curriculum very begrudgingly cites Jackson, only to cast him aside as insignificant to the work of educational theory.