



Space to breathe: George Floyd, BLM plaza and the monumentalization of divided American Urban landscapes

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Space to breathe: George Floyd, BLM plaza and the monumentalization of divided American Urban landscapes

The men who talk most about the valor of Lee and of 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 then war was going on ... (John Mitchell, Nineteenth Century Richmond City Black Councilman, quoted in Griego, 2015)

I can't breathe. (George Floyd, quoted in Opperl Jr. & Barker, 2020, July 8)

Hope is invented every day. (James Baldwin quoted in Adelse, 1970, p. 46)

Introduction

George Floyd's death at the hands of Minneapolis police and the large scale national and international eruption of protest that it provoked put into stark prominence lingering questions about the political and democratic order in the United States. Black struggle from slavery to the present has always had generative effect on the broader culture and ethos and the very identity of the US as an imagined community. It has provoked the most profound questions about our humanity and identity in a nation that dissimulates its racist and colonial practices in order to bombastically proclaim itself as a purified model to the world. Indeed, Floyd's public torture, his execution by police operating within and outside the limits of the law, is yet another heart wrenching reminder of Bruno Latour's provocative claim that even in the case of the most advanced societies (the United States included): 'we have never been modern.' (Latour, 1993, p. 10) Once again, it has stirred up the never-fully-sedimentary question of America's image of itself to the world. It has particularly laid bare the matter of America's incomplete modernity and the uneven and asymmetrical character of race relations and social relations in general within the country. A central flash point of this contestation has been articulated to city life and, especially city space, where for the last few decades, as with the Arab Spring, urban dwellers have actively coordinated their negative judgement on programs of neoliberal gentrification that continue to threaten their very existential survival in our cities. Indeed, the past decades of urban 'development' and 'renewal' have unceasingly accelerated an expulsion and elimination of black and brown poor from the city's core. This has made the city the site of permanent contestation; and as long as a will to dignity in social life remains, permanent revolution. For it is the authors' firm belief that when the revolution reaches critical mass in the United States it will fume from the city's perverse and roiling core.

In what follows in this paper, we therefore seek to draw out a key strand of this continuing contest over the sutured symbols of modern life in America, and the persistent racialized conditions of Black and Brown people within it, that Floyd's death and the protest over it have provoked. Specifically, we focus on what the struggle over spatialization that the declaration of the sanctuary space of the recently declared Black Lives Matter Plaza (BLM Plaza) in Washington D.C., right in front of the White House makes plain. We argue that this powerful symbolic reinsertion of widespread social and civic support for Black struggle back into city space as a response to

Floyd's death, in an area of the U.S.' most politically prominent real estate, not only affirms the dignity of Black and Brown lives. It also brings into sharpened focus a struggle for the soul of U.S. modernity in the articulations of its built space. Such struggle has to be continuously restarted and sustained as there exists persistent aggravation stemming from the popular authoritarian impulse to consecrate public space as a platform for the enforcement of a visible white supremacy. This contestation over the divided landscape of this country emerges out of the building out and monumentalization of space in the conundrum that is America's past and present. Prompted by these developments that are the up thrust of Floyd's state-licensed murder, this paper urges reconsideration of race and space in relation to the monumentalization of the American divided landscape. We ask readers to consider what has been codified in America's built space. We implore our readers to look forthrightly at the 'power geometry' (Massey, 1993) embedded in this landscape, particularly the perpetuation of the subversion of black life and black pasts into the state-affirmed white supremacy which such monumentalization authorizes and signifies.

The context: The BLM plaza as a response to black expulsion

The story of George Floyd's extrajudicial killing at the hands of the police served as a reminder that since the first moment of settler-colonialism on American soil, the practices of 'U.S. state agents' and their precursors have been incessantly devoted to a murderous assault on Black and Indigenous life and an unrestrained avarice to expropriate all land and natural resources. This 'reminder' and its popular response exist at two separate poles of America's struggle with its hypocrisy, its deluded proclamation of modernity, and its persistent coddling of white supremacy in the organization and monumentalization of built space. Since our nation's coming of age ballroom dance through slavery, expropriation, colonization and widespread murder, Black and Indigenous struggle over space to breathe, straining like levies against an ever increasing tide, have always run up against the culturally exceptionalist creed and the heedless notion of America's 'friction-free leap' into modernity. American bureaucrats and social scientists, such as Talcott Parsons and W.W. Rostow, extolled this murderous leap to the world particularly in programs of modernization, modernization theory, and the proposition of constant development that needed to be dished out to any countries that could 'bare the market,' and particularly in the Global South since the Cold War era (Gilman, 2003).

We start our exploration of the current events regarding Floyd and their significance for our reappraisal of the orchestration of space in the prominent urban landscapes of this country by revisiting the bald facts. On that fateful Memorial Day of Monday May 25, 2020, George Floyd, a 46-year-old Black man, was arrested for allegedly trying to pass off a counterfeit twenty-dollar bill in a convenience store in Minneapolis, Minnesota. The arrest ended in Floyd's abominable death, a public and extrajudicial execution, at the hands of the police. The graphic video of Floyd's last moments, handcuffed, lifeless, as three policemen sat on his back, while a fourth closed off his air passage with a knee on his neck, catapulted this rehearsed police killing of Black men into the volatile media sphere, vaporizing the distinction between old and new media faster than it takes the state to kill a man. As the clip of this horrifying event burned through social media and all major news outlets, the whole country erupted anew in explosive and indignant protests against the refrain of police-brutality and state-executed violence. Ricocheting across the country and indeed the planet, these would become a burgeoning center of gravity for the Black Lives Matter movement, which the country's rightwing Chief Executive Officer of the White House, Donald J. Trump, perplexingly called 'a symbol of hate' (Donald J. Trump, 2020), evidence of U.S. state-birthed attempts to justify White supremacist violence. Fierce resistance was precipitated the likes of which had not been seen in the United States since the 1960s.



Figure 1. “Black Lives Matter (BLM)” written on District of Columbia’s 16th street corridor, photo courtesy: Stephanie Leedom.

And with the vehement public mobilization in full swing, the anger over more than 400 years of White and settler-colonial violence burned in the nation’s capital, Washington, D.C.

With this propulsive pressure, these developments prompted a surprising symbolic recodification of space in the nation’s capital, at the behest of a city. On Friday, June 5, 2020, the mayor of Washington, D.C. commissioned city workers to paint the historic axial-corridor of the District of Columbia’s 16th Street with massive yellow, street-wide words: ‘Black Lives Matter (BLM)’ (Willingham, [Figure 1](#)). A new space thus emerged in the capital and in the national imagination of America’s Black community. Registering in wine dens and caviar lounges across Washington D.C. as a cry from the soul for a new dispensation, certain bastions of White supremacy, such as the Trump White House, responded angrily, fearful of even the slightest gesture that might besmirch their hypocritical, ‘Modern’ façade. On the street and across the world’s bus stops, libraries, park benches and chat rooms, the mayor’s efforts have been read as yet another ‘distraction,’ dramatically invoked to dissemble the city’s false promises for action (BlackLivesMatter DC). While symbolically provocative as a sound-bite for U.S. mass media, which always works to titillate while clawing the popular narrative back to a comfortable status quo, the city’s mayor-commissioned-actions were in lieu of real change. The mayor has shown hardly an inclination to ‘Defund the Police,’ a foundational demand for the majority of our recent protests, and a rally cry that has galvanized and put voice to the real needs of the U.S.’s overpoliced, state-violated and underfunded communities. The cry for material change has, and will always be, the only true call of dispossessed and marginalized communities across the U.S. and across the world.

A mural may proclaim, but it does not speak like money does. As such, the mayor’s symbol operates in the political and not the social sphere. It is a statement of one political regime against another. It is a statement of Democrats versus Trump-Republicans, and it functions more as an effort for political ‘liberals’ to attempt, hopelessly, to disinherit the fraught trajectory of our nation’s ‘Modern lift off’. It is not, unfortunately, any sort of affirmation that the state-funded, state-mandated and state-executed conditions that caused Floyd’s death, and the death of nearly

1,100 Americans in 2019 (Higgins and Schoen, 2020), will be coming to an end anytime soon. Recognizing the mayor's mural as an attempt to distract organizers from the real work to be done, protestors 'reclaimed the message, repainting the mural to say, "Black Lives Matter=Defund the Police"' (Project for Public Spaces). The mayor and her supporting cast are not the magicians they may think they are, because our publics know the tricks, and remember the disheartening game. Protests are not conferences and they are not legislative sessions. The point is not to create words but to use words to create action. The only statement that matters is the 'talk' of money, 'Defund the Police'; not the words of a mayor, trying to become a fan seven years tardy. These polarizing events demonstrate the multi-level semiotic projects that symbol mobilization enacts. While many, and especially 'white liberals,' applauded the mayor's efforts (BlackLivesMatter DCa), BlackLivesMatter DC recognized what it meant for the real social circumstances across America: the mayor was not about to move forward with any form of 'abolition democracy' anytime soon (Davis, 2011). The people will have to keep pushing.

At the national level, and certainly the terrain of legibility of Trump and the Republican party, the attempt of this sign to diffuse social calls for real change remained largely unrecognized. At this level, the sign retained its unabashedly hypocritical register, claiming to speak truth to power. The historic 16th Street runs as a central axis straight southward terminating in the north portico of the White House, Lafayette Square, where the genocidal U.S. President Andrew Jackson's equestrian statue bears down from the center with a direct line of vision (Loring, 2017). Jackson, whose graven image on a twenty-dollar bill created the opportunity for yet another state-execution, Floyd's murder; birthed the Native American genocide in the Southeastern United States, exalted racial discrimination and led a constant state-supported barrage against anti-slavery and abolitionist movements. That same day that the mayor commissioned 'Black Lives Matter' to be painted, June 5, the more than a century old Lafayette Plaza was officially renamed 'Black Lives Matter Plaza,' stamped with its own city street sign. This urban face-lift took place through texts, the removal of iconic statues, and the renaming of the square—bringing about an extraordinary transfiguration of consecrated space in the national register. It established the visibilization of a new political order struggling to come into being and it thrust forward an oblique questioning of the disposition of U.S. city space. One political regime to another, playing power games of rhetoric for the fate of an impending U.S. Presidential election, it was a remarkable example of a strategic war over signs that has invaded the most privileged exemplar of U.S. hegemonic landscapes.

As with the mayor's political act, Floyd's death reminds us that the U.S. is not modern, and indeed, all the nation's murals and monuments are but 'a thin veil to cover up crimes which would disgrace a nation of savages' (Douglass, 1852). But its powerful call out to humanity was the accumulation of the cries of hundreds of years of violation and suffering, and resisting and surviving. In so doing, it snagged the veil that covers the U.S. claim of a just and fair modern democratic order. It re-surfaced and re-exposed America's long fractured society that dwells within its nationalistic perimeters. Hence, today, Floyd's last words 'I can't breathe' serve as a reminder of the hypocrisy that shrouds the long-standing aura around Washington, D.C., which has always stolen its way toward an 'ideal democratic landscape' and, also paradoxically, never ceases to be the signature and epitome of colonial power. D.C.'s beautiful landscape was a design tool that has long served to bury and obscure the nation's Black history. It has existed as a glittering codification of White supremacy and fragile hegemony. And now, the BLM plaza calls this settled narrative of Anglo-American triumph into question at the national level. The plaza provides a token of recognition for all those who have felt unheard, and it is a sign that the construction of a new 'abolition democracy' (Davis) is beginning to catch attention in the ballrooms and boardrooms of the United States.

Codifying colonial space: Some historical background

The story of the capital's origin is lodged in the historical backdrop of profound inequality, callousness and indifference. It is the space where monumentalized white supremacy overlays markings of an imperial and racial order. Its origins therefore are rooted in paradox, contradiction and disavowal. Though the nation's capital ostensibly asserts that the US is a democratic country, the process of designing DC was never at all democratic. It did not arise from people's popular imaginings; it was instead the choice of George Washington (1732–1799), the first president of the United States, to make a federal center. He decided that the District of Columbia, the core of the new government, would be by the Potomac River, 13 miles north of Mount Vernon, his own 8,000-acre opulent estate (Washington, 1919). Pierre Charles L'Enfant, who was recruited from France to fight in the American Revolutionary War and whom Washington personally trusted, designed Washington, D.C. in 1791, following a French vernacular (Bowling, 2002). L'Enfant designed the ornate city in Baroque style, transposing French colonial architectural elements to the American landscape. This orchestration of built space, its monumental language and superimposed circles and axes were directly derived from French colonial design vocabularies of that time. L'Enfant's plan was not merely to place the important buildings and the people of power in strategic locations based on the contours of waterways and shifting elevations, but also to make a city that could be 'beautiful'—white washing and pasting over the material fact of the deep integration of black labor in the construction of the capital center and the presence of blackness in the capital's surrounding landscape. Thus, L'Enfant's D.C. was an exemplary city of power which later was also emulated in the making of other colonial cities such as Edwards Lutyen's New Delhi in India. L'Enfant's biographer Scott Berg noted that his plan was intended to make the nation's capital a city of 'public walk,' where, '[t]he entire city was built around the idea that every citizen was equally important.' (Berg quoted in Fletcher, 2008). L'Enfant's idea of a 'public walk for all,' paradoxically, consecrated brutal asymmetries of inclusion and exclusion that continue to violate all who bear the burden of this nation since its founding acts of expropriation, genocide, colonization, enforced domination, imposed starvation and slavery (Dunbar-Ortiz, 2014). In making Washington's dream into reality, L'Enfant sought any good Modern's ideal, the purification of space (Latour, 1993). His urban imagination cross-pollinated with colonial times and social contexts of white violence, which promoted the elevation of elite viewers and, especially, leaders of the community of whiteness, who would be immersed in the disgustingly-privileged visual and spatial pleasure that D.C.'s vistas, urban walks, streets, and landscape afforded to the heedless colonizers. Thus, blackness was concealed from the visible landscape spaces, and evidently for the U.S.'s hoax of modernism to continue, it must remain absconded!

In the consolidation of its racial order, today, D.C. is a city of racial inequality. It consciously elevates its iconic buildings and monuments while defunding the spaces and ignoring the voices of marginalized communities. Hence the legacy of slaveholdings has always been intentionally obscured. Consider as a starting point, for instance, Jefferson's land ordinance of 1785 and the elaboration of Jefferson's grid, a landscaping gauge and signature facilitating farmland purchasing rights, ruthlessly interred and erased knowledge of the gender or race of workers who toiled on such lands. This was the first supremacist codification of landscape infrastructure of United States. It confirmed a divided and asymmetrical landscape in which white actors owned and black and brown subjects toiled. This landscaping formula drove the organization, surveying and carving up of public space and lands across the country and the rectangular design of urban spaces like gardens, plazas, fountains, and large avenues set in axes that direct one's gaze often to the white buildings, and terminates in a focus that often symbolizes the white power and ownership of public spaces (Carstensen, 1988). Consequently, overall, the proportioning of space across the country had always been an instrument for a rather ubiquitously divisive landscape, yet deceptively symbolizing democracy (the paradoxical myth sustained by Jefferson and others of the yeoman white farmer working alongside their slaves at the center of the consideration of

the organization of the political order [Hofstadter, 1956]). D.C. therefore sprouted from a dominant landscape imagination focusing on the nation's founding fathers, the white presidents, and served to suppress the other side, which is Blackness—a landscape of the Black and Indigenous, which was ignobly designed by civil-authority to be invisible, hidden, and unspoken. With the landscape of Presidents' homes and estates designed in neoclassical styles, the White landscape stretches from D.C. to Virginia, North Carolina, Massachusetts, Tennessee, New York, and spaces across the West. Virginia's Presidential estates such as Thomas Jefferson's Monticello in Charlottesville, James Madison's Montpelier, and the Berkley Estate of President Benjamin Harrison remain close to this governmental core. All these estates, gardens, and public spaces serve to glorify the leaders of this horrific settler colonial fantasy, fueling the nightmare of Whiteness, superiority, violence and death across the landscape. In contrast to these late Presidents who are still celebrated in their glorified monumental cemeteries, the burial grounds of their Black and indigenous counterparts (their advisers, their workers, their sometimes forbidden lovers and help) were too frequently desecrated, erased or suppressed from arising. Black slaves worked as the oppressed labor on these projects. They were the foundational labor on which the White House is built! The markers of this labor are now unimaginably whitewashed out of the public record and the history primers used in schools. Innumerable enslaved bodies disappeared in the woods of these landscapes, unrecognized and banished; these bodies demand a desperate ethnographic archeology of Black labor in the construction of Colonial America. They cry out for a revelation of Colonial America's torturous past so that we can better understand its turbulent and hypocritical present.

This banishment of Black and Indigenous labor and subjectivity has horrifically marched onward from the founding of the settler-country. Its post-Civil War regional bifurcation into North-South continues in the unceasing present-day expulsions of the Black and Brown poor everywhere! The North triumphed, and thus slavery 'ended.' Yet with a bifurcated landscape, emancipation remained in practice illusory, something of a shibboleth as unofficial slavery, chain gangs and the prison complex blossomed their terrifying fruit across the nation. Social division, oppression, and violence continued systematically in structured ways even after the culmination of the war that many believed would bring harmony and final emancipation from slavery. America's White heritage dominated the popular culture, not by accidental gestation but constant fomentation and instigation. This hegemonic fomentation is illustrated in the pedaling of nationalistic mementos like President Washington's portrait embedded on stamps (1947) and President Jackson's image on the twenty-dollar bill that formed the pretext for the extrajudicial murder of George Floyd.

By the end of the nineteenth century and early twentieth century, coterminous with the consolidation of Jim Crow, the landscape of Whiteness grew in its violent prolix. A powerful example of this can be identified with respect to the monumentalization of space in Virginia. Civil War monuments were erected in Virginia's capital Richmond in the concerted effort to consecrate and make a popular a palpable landscape that would evoke the pre-Civil War past. The great broader aim, then, was to valorize the Southern heroes of the Confederacy invoking in collective memory the vainglorious recuperation of those who had lost the consequential internecine war over slavery. But whose collective memory was evoked? Richmond's Monument Avenue, as a case in point, was designed as a tree-lined grassy mall punctuated by statues of Virginian Confederate veterans of the American Civil War (Whiteness alone was enough to redeem these contested figures, some might argue, from their betrayal and terrorism against the developing state). Many of the designs followed the model of colonial streets in England, and the statues reflect those set in place by the British in Colonial India and throughout its empire as symbols of pride (Cannadine, 2001). Over the objections from the Black members of Richmond's City Council, the City appropriated spaces for the dedication of five monuments of J. E. B. Stuart, Jefferson Davis, Thomas Jackson, Matthew Fontaine Maury, and that most influential and provocative figure, General Robert E. Lee, in the time of the Jim Crow era (Griego, 2015; Driggs

et al., 2001). Colonial Archer Anderson of the Lee Monument Association said that the city had 'dedicated the Lee Monument not as a memory to the Confederacy, but as a testament to "personal honor," "patriotic hope and cheer," and an "ideal leader"' (Griego, 2015). But whose patriotic past is it? And whose pride is enacted at the cost of so much pain and violence?

In their material and discursive elaboration of the vernacular of Whiteness, these equestrian Confederate statues have become symbols that idolize the racial supremacy, hatred, and racism of the Confederacy. Inversely, their erection and valorization have come at great cost to Black and Brown people as these monuments silently abet racial violations through landscapes, assuring further epistemic violence. In their exultation and codification of history's victors (in reality, the reborn losers and traitors of the American Civil War) they continue the long trajectory of the suppression of Black subjectivity, Blackness and Black iconography in the American landscape.

The potency and sovereignty of Whiteness are ensured and established by means of these statues. Institutional campuses, such as the University of Virginia at Charlottesville, have war monuments like the statues of Robert E. Lee and Thomas 'Stonewall' Jackson, which are protected by state law. To these must be added the litany of paintings of elite property owners, members of the plantation squirearchy and the celebratory bunting and emblems idealizing the Colonial era that are scattered across university property, not only in the South but in the North as well. Many of these figures, often benefactors of U.S. universities, made their profits from operations in some part of the universe of slavery. These powerfully symbolic figures now often serve to arouse more racial violations. These emotionally charged spaces impose an excessive force from the landscape that is comparable to the physical force that the police officers inflicted on George Floyd and others like Eric Garner, who also died of extrajudicial police chokehold while arresting him in 2014, and many more.

But the war over signs which monumentalization provokes does not and cannot end with the 'victors of history.' Such a struggle over the iconography of the past and the present is marked by ruptures and discontinuities. There is a current of resistance against the grain of the cultural dominant, after Gramsci, 'a war of maneuver.' It is the long revolution that was enjoined by those late-nineteenth century Black Richmond City Council members, like John Mitchell, who resisted the instalment of statues that would convert 'white traitors' like Robert E. Lee into heroes:

The men who talk most about the valor of Lee and of 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 then war was going on ... (Mitchell quoted in Griego, 2015)

A bend in the river of history

In the blaze of the current uprising against the police's incessant brutality, and after the suffering of so many violations and murders throughout Black history, the outcry provoked by Floyd's death successfully soiled the veil shrouding the landscape of blackness. It echoes forward deep existential yearnings from the long *durée* of Black struggle against confined spaces and imposed monumentalization. On June 5, 2020, amidst the context of powerful community indignation, D.C.'s African American Mayor Muriel Bowser decided to put out nationally visible texts in gigantic letters that attempted to capture the spirit of 'Black Lives Matter' in the direction of the White House. And, she would subsequently rename Lafayette Plaza as 'Black Lives Matter Plaza.' This iconoclastic gesture certainly strikes a blow against Andrew Jackson's malignant equestrian statue from the War of 1812 that was the center of focus of the square, now disowned in the new BLM Plaza. It also catalyzes on the civic terrain a possible step toward the repossession of blackness in Monument Avenue vis-à-vis America's tragically defined nationalist landscape. On June 4, responding to the massive outpouring of devastated anger over Floyd's death, Virginia's governor Ralph Northam pledged to remove the iconic statue of General Lee (Figure 3).



Figure 2. The White House fence and the threshold between the public and the private realm becomes a healing landscape form, photo courtesy: Stephanie Leedom.

This historic decision, if and when implemented, will change the meaning of D.C.'s White nationalist landscape, stinging its Whiteness just a little, or rather indicating the very long road toward another possibility. Other leaders of Virginia have also committed to taking down the other four Confederate statues along prominent Monument Avenue, changing the asserted meaning that has unfortunately been triumphant for more than a century. The thresholds of fences in the plaza areas without any designer whims may one day turn into a healing landscape of tears and joy as well (Figure 2). Floyd's death echoes the call of resistance to state-driven genocide. Such a call reverberates in the plea not just for justice, but also for the defunding and dismantling of these technologies and apparatuses of state oppression and violence. The upthrust of these developments places enormous discursive and material pressure on the dominant forms of monumentalization of landscapes in the United States and around world. It puts in historical suspension those pesky conundrums and hypocrisies that have always afflicted dominant landscape design in this country. And it brings into view the charge of the light brigade of rag and tag interventions of designer and non-designer activists punching not only above their weight, but for their right to be acknowledged. The call of humanity to George Floyd's memory ripples across space and time, urging a recognition of the known world by a mixed group of designers and non-designers, old and young, people of all genders, spheres, modes of being classed and racialized under the banner of flags, programs for change, varied perspectives and attitudes. Not since the 1960s have public design processes in city space been placed under so much cultural and material pressure!

Conclusion: Black lives and landscape have always mattered

In the twenty-first century, these landscapes of Whiteness continue with a denial of the history of all those who have been oppressed. Hence, today, we say, 'Black Lives and Landscape have



Figure 3. George Floyd's face overlaid on General Lee's statue on Monument Avenue, Richmond, photo: Internet, New York Post June 10, 2020.

always Mattered;' and the conditions for social life will continue to be fought for until they are attained and all systems of oppression, including police and the police-state systems, dismantled. From these social, economic, political and landscape interventions, people recognize the connotative and powerholding part of our social landscape. This change is a tiny step toward emancipation after a long, suffocating history, and also a reassertion and reclamation against state-oppression, which will maintain its stronghold as long as systems of state-driven violence, policing and the willful negligence of violated treaties go unrecognized and unaccounted for. George Floyd's last words 'I can't breathe,' as a cry of humanity, overturns L'Enfant's gaze, decrypts the codified, Colonial landscape and is being remembered in the reclamation of public spaces, the White nationalist landscapes of D.C. The inequitable landscape of Whiteness is recognized within historical context and meaning. As protests erupt in DC, their spirit spreads throughout the world. Many other communities and peoples are calling out for a rendezvous with and a recognition of history and the myriad disgraceful, supremacist, settler-colonial, and oppressive landscapes. Today, the masses demand the removal of controversial Confederate statues across the country; terrible statues saturated with the glorifications of injustice such as the Robert E. Lee equestrian statue (Figure 3) in Richmond Virginia or the Texas Rangers in Dallas. In global communities such as those in France, England and Belgium, protestors have also called for the confiscation of their Colonial statues. In Belgium, protestors have demanded removal of the statue of the brutal Colonizer, King Leopold II, one of the first 'leaders' to be remembered for 'crimes against humanity' (Williams & Franklin, 1985). In France, protestors splashed red paint on the statue of the French revolutionary Voltaire who was the owner of sizeable colonial plantation holdings. And in England, the statue of the slave trader Robert Millington and the colonialist, Cecil Rhodes, have also been confronted with a similar public rejection. Hence, shaking the core of our consciousness, which many have long ignored, we come to a recognition of old forms of hegemonic spatial organization as 'Black Lives and Landscape have always Mattered.'

What one is strongly reminded of, regarding these developments, is the generative power of Black struggle in the U.S., its capacity to hold up a torch of scrutiny to the modern condition all over the U.S. and across the world. This struggle, as we indicated in this article, is right now being conducted, as it always has been, on many fronts powerfully articulated to space. It challenges not only the monumentalization of space in which White supremacy and hegemony have been etched into the landscape, codifying a terrible relationship of settler-colonial powers to terrorized people and exalting despicable White supremacy over the human interests of oppressed and marginalized subjects everywhere. It also challenges the bombastic symbols of one civic organization to another. Thus, it dutifully challenges the socially negligible actions by the mayor of Washington, D.C., who thought that a few marks on the pavement could distract people from the real work to be done: defund and dismantle all state-driven systems of oppression and violence. The liquid installation of 'Black Lives Matter,' made firmer by adding '— Defund the Police,' and the elevation of BLM Plaza, not only in front of the White House but onto the agendas of many around world, serve to prod the consciences of those self-satisfied with the 'purified' settler-relations of 'Modern' society. They project an alternative agenda of political recognition against the long durée of White Supremacy across landscapes, practices and state-executed enforcement in our cities. They remind many to rise up against the grotesque reordering of space that neoliberal policy making has scripted onto city space and the systems of policing that desperately hope to maintain it. Despite its innumerable shortcomings, the BLM Plaza serves notice on a status quo that is no longer tenable.

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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