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# Separate times, shared spaces: Arthur Ashe, Monument Avenue and the politics of Richmond, Virginia's symbolic landscape

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In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, monuments honouring white heroes of the Confederate States of America were erected along Monument Avenue in Richmond, Virginia. In 1995, a vociferous debate occurred in Richmond over a proposal to 'integrate' the Avenue, still considered to be the South's grandest Confederate memorial site, with a statue of the late African American Richmond native, tennis star and human rights activist Arthur Ashe. While on the surface, the main issue in the debate was where to locate the Ashe statue, the underlying debate over Richmond's symbolic landscape centred on issues of race relations, identity and power in Richmond at the end of the twentieth century.

In 1890, an estimated 100 000 persons descended on the former Confederate States of America capital of Richmond, Virginia for the unveiling of a 60-foot monument to Confederate General Robert E. Lee (Figure 1). The Lee statue marked one of the first major attempts to commemorate the Southern role in the Civil War in the region's public spaces. Over the next 25 years, white Southerners erected numerous Confederate monuments across the region's landscape.<sup>1</sup> These tributes to the 'Lost Cause' were especially revered in Richmond, and between 1890 and 1920 the city would become the home of important Confederate monuments, parades and celebrations. The focal point for this activity was Monument Avenue, as five impressive monuments, including three to what Charles Reagan Wilson refers to as the 'Lost Cause trinity' of Robert E. Lee, Jefferson Davis and Stonewall Jackson, were erected along this fashionable street. As Wilson argues, 'Richmond was the Mecca of the Lost Cause, and Monument [Avenue . . .] was the sacred road to it.'<sup>2</sup>

One century after the unveiling of the Lee monument, the National Park Service still referred to Monument Avenue as 'the South's grandest commemorative precinct

dedicated to the heroes of the Lost Cause'.<sup>3</sup> The early 1990s saw attempts to add statues to Monument Avenue. This time, however, a black Richmond City councilman proposed statues of black heroes of the civil rights movement.<sup>4</sup> While this attempt to 'integrate' the Avenue was unsuccessful, a major debate took place in 1995 over whether a statue of the late African American Richmond native, tennis star and human rights activist Arthur Ashe should be erected along Monument Avenue. In this heated debate over whether Ashe should share the same Avenue with the Confederates, both African American supporters and much of the traditional white Southern population in Richmond tried to define and redefine their separate heroic eras (civil rights versus Civil War) within the same public space (Monument Avenue).

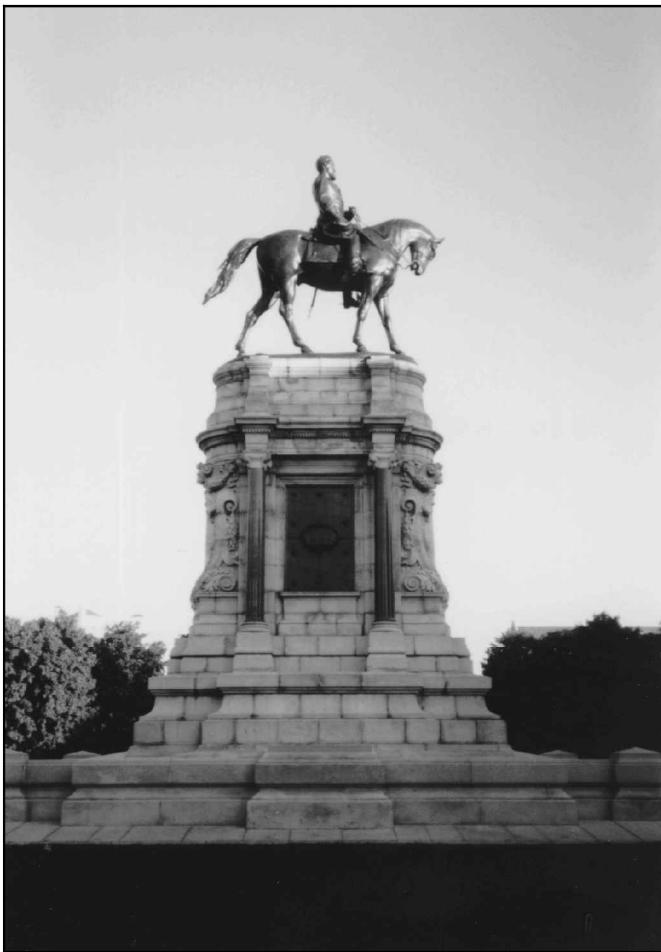


FIGURE 1 Robert E. Lee Monument (erected 1890). Monument Avenue and Allen Avenue

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This paper examines in detail the 1995 debates in Richmond over the ‘proper’ location for the Ashe statue (Figure 2). The first section discusses recent debates over identity, iconography and landscape in the South and reviews perspectives that underlie the Ashe debate. The second section examines the historical development of Monument Avenue. The third part looks at the life and death of Arthur Ashe. Part four analyses the 1995 debate over the location for the Arthur Ashe statue. While on the surface the main issue in the debate was the location of a statue, the underlying debate over Richmond’s symbolic landscape centred on issues of race relations, identity and power in Richmond at the end of the twentieth century.



FIGURE 2 Arthur Ashe Monument (erected 1996). Monument Avenue and Roseneath Road

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## Iconography, landscape, public memory and race in the symbolic South

The past four decades have witnessed tremendous economic, political and social change in the American South, leading to debates over the region's identity. As part of this debate, questions have been raised about how the region's history and culture should be represented on the landscape, as both traditional white Southerners and African American Southerners vie to define the region's public memory by controlling the right to determine whose history is represented within the region's public spaces. Conflict has occurred recently over the placement of both groups' iconography on the landscape because each of their heroic eras were won at the perceived expense of the other. Thus, debates have occurred over whether and where to place Confederate and civil rights symbols on the landscape, including debates over whether and where governments should sanction the flying of Confederate flags and rename streets for the Revd Dr Martin Luther King, Jr.<sup>5</sup> While some have argued that these debates over the placement of African American and traditional white Southern symbols are meaningless for the daily lives of the region's residents, their ferocity suggests otherwise. Merelman contends that in the late twentieth century United States, racial conflict is played out more through cultural politics than ever before.<sup>6</sup> This conflict is likely to be heightened when it involves locating symbols from these two groups in the same public space, as was the case of the Arthur Ashe statue on Monument Avenue.

These debates are informed by and situated at the intersection of such concepts as iconography and iconology, landscape representation and public memory, as well as the growing literature on race and whiteness studies. Symbols, such as monuments, are a central element of a political territory's iconography, the set of common symbols, ideas and values promoted by a state to bind its citizens' loyalties to that state. At the same time, however, geographers and others have moved to study these symbols' iconology, the 'decoding' or deconstruction of these iconographic images and symbols 'within a larger complex of cultural, social and political values'.<sup>7</sup>

The primary discussion in 1995, however, was not whether to memorialize Arthur Ashe's legacy with a monument. Instead, the vitriolic debate centred on where within Richmond's cultural landscape that monument should be placed. Thus, the iconology of the Ashe statue itself cannot be discussed without understanding the cultural landscape, Monument Avenue, in which it was placed, and how the meanings of the statue and the landscape were transformed by each other. As Schein argues, the cultural landscape itself has meaning, in that it is 'a tangible visible entity, one that is both reflective and constitutive of society, culture, and identity'.<sup>8</sup> One of the central elements in the creation of these landscapes is power. As Mitchell puts it,

'landscape' is a relation of power, an *ideological* rendering of spatial relations. Landscapes transform the facts of place into a *controlled* representation, an imposition of order in which one (or perhaps a few) dominant ways of seeing are substituted for all ways of seeing and experiencing.<sup>9</sup>

One place where the power to control the landscape ideologically is most obvious is in the placing of public monuments commemorating the past in public spaces. As Savage

suggests, these 'monuments do not arise as if by natural law to celebrate the deserving; they are built by people with sufficient power to marshal (or impose) public consent for their erection.'<sup>10</sup> In the context of nation-building, Johnson demonstrates how the symbolism and location of public monuments have been used in the construction of identity and nationalism. She notes that the

location of statuary reveals the ways in which monuments serve as the focal point for the expression of social action and a collectivist politic, and the iconography of statues exposes how class, 'race', and gender differences are negotiated in public space.<sup>11</sup>

As suggested above, the erection of monuments along Monument Avenue, such as those of Robert E. Lee in the 1890s and Arthur Ashe in the 1990s, was not solely to commemorate the achievements of the past. Rather, as Bodnar suggests through the concept of public memory, how the past is interpreted, commemorated and represented has as much to do with shaping how society understands its present and future as with about the past *per se*. In addition, Bodnar reminds us that how the past is interpreted (and by extension, how the past is commemorated on the cultural landscape) is intensely political, constantly evolving and subject to contestation.<sup>12</sup> Schein points out that cultural landscapes themselves are never completed, in that they are constantly evolving.

Landscapes are always in the process of 'becoming,' no longer reified or concretized – inert and there – but continually under scrutiny, at once manipulable and manipulated, always subject to change, and everywhere implicated in the ongoing formulation of social life.<sup>13</sup>

In the case of public monuments, the symbolism of the monuments and the landscapes in which they are situated is not static and is always open to debate, redefinition and change. Bodnar suggests that these political conflicts over how to memorialize the past have more to do with the struggle for power in the present than with commemorating the past.<sup>14</sup>

### ***Race and the symbolic landscape***

Richmond's Arthur Ashe monument location debate was not primarily about whether to honour a great tennis player and humanitarian, but was instead about where to honour a great *African American* tennis player and humanitarian. Issues of race dominated the discourse over the monument's location.

The debates over how racial histories and identities are portrayed on the landscape are important because 'race' is socially constructed.<sup>15</sup> As Omi and Winant note, racial categories are continuously being 'created, inhabited, transformed and destroyed' through sociohistoric processes. They suggest that these changes are the results of a 'racial project', which they define as 'an interpretation, representation, or explanation of racial dynamics, and an effort to reorganize and redistribute resources along particular racial lines'. Schein makes the linkage between these 'racial projects' and the cultural landscape, arguing that these interpretations, representations and explanations of racial dynamics manifest themselves on the landscape and, as a result, help shape racial dynamics and identity. As Schein argues, a 'cultural landscape can be racialized, and a

racialized landscape serves to either naturalize, or make normal, or provide the means to challenge racial formations and racist practices'.<sup>16</sup> Thus the debate over whether to honour an African American on Monument Avenue can be seen as more than just a question of where to locate a monument, but rather as part of a 'racial project'.

Along with 'black', the racial category 'white' is also socially constructed. The history of Monument Avenue can be read as a white 'racialized landscape' and 'racial project'. Thus, the concept of 'whiteness' from critical race theory informs the Monument Avenue debate. Wray and Newitz argue that whiteness

calls for recognition of the ways in which whiteness serves as a sort of invisible norm, the unracial centre of a racialized world. Whiteness is different from blackness . . . in that it has long held the privileged place of racial normativity . . . It has been the invisibility (for whites) of whiteness that has enabled white Americans to stand as unmarked, normative bodies and social selves, the standard against which all others are judged (and found wanting).

Thus, scholars 'have called for whites to reevaluate themselves and their identities self-consciously, eschewing a vision of whiteness as the "norm" for a more realistic and fair-minded understanding of whiteness as a specific, racially marked group existing in relation to many other such groups'.<sup>17</sup>

Seeing whiteness as an invisible norm extends to iconography, which in and of itself expresses a group's culture and values. In the South and the US as a whole, whites have generally controlled the power to commemorate history in the landscape and many historic sites and public monuments represent whites rather than other groups. As Foote notes, 'America's white majority has had two centuries to develop and mark its myth of origins in the landscape. Its point of view has been etched into almost all historical memorials and markers at the local, state, regional and national levels.'<sup>18</sup> So, for example, Merelman documents that only 6 per cent of all US National Historic Landmarks designated between 1960 and 1985 commemorated African American history. Savage notes that while African Americans played a pivotal role in the Civil War, only three Civil War monuments commemorate any black soldiers, and two of these commemorate only one black soldier among many others within the monument.<sup>19</sup> In Richmond, as of 1991, only three of the city's 65 public monuments recognized African Americans.<sup>20</sup> In the case of Monument Avenue, a hallmark of Southern white culture, the battle over Arthur Ashe was in part a battle to highlight the exclusionary nature of the Avenue's symbolism: rather than being an inclusive symbol of Southern history and culture, the Avenue was instead an exclusive symbol of Southern *white* history and culture.

## **Monument Avenue**

The 1995 decision to place the Arthur Ashe statue on Monument Avenue was controversial because of the symbolism of the Avenue to the traditional white Richmond community and to the city as a whole. Over the past century, Monument Avenue, located in the heavily white Fan District of what is today a majority black city, has been one of the city's most fashionable residential streets. Constructed between the 1890s and 1920s, the Avenue was part of the era's 'City Beautiful' movement, similar to and inspired by

other grand residential avenues.<sup>21</sup> Its status as one of Richmond's most prominent streets has been maintained for the past century. Richard Guy Wilson suggests that in the early twentieth century Monument Avenue 'was the preferred address for the local wealthy and those who aspired to that status', while Busbee notes it is still today considered to be 'one of the South's grandest streets, an impressive stretch of red brick Colonial Revival homes divided by an oak-lined median'.<sup>22</sup> What gives Monument its name and character are the five impressive statues of Confederate heroes erected along it from 1890 to 1929. As Wilson claims, the Avenue 'may be a place of residences and churches, a street of movement and communication, but ultimately Monument Avenue is the site of memorials to the Confederacy. And it is back to these statues one must come, for their message cannot be ignored.'<sup>23</sup>

The erection of Confederate statues along Monument Avenue and throughout the South in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was part of the larger 'Lost Cause' movement, an effort to script the history of the South in the Civil War as a chivalrous and gallant society that entered the war to defend home and honour.<sup>24</sup> However, this common identity was also being forged for the Southern nation's future as well. Promoting the South's past gave Southerners a foundation to link from and work towards a 'New South', a prosperous future built on rapid industrialization. As Cobb argues,

the New South Creed was one potent piece of mythology. It painted an almost seamless and undeniably seductive mural in which a glorious past, a reassuring present, and a glittering future were fully integrated and virtually indistinguishable. The Old South legend was the emotional and psychological cornerstone of the New South ideal.<sup>25</sup>

As well as being the Old South's capital in the Civil War, Richmond was also the region's leading industrial centre in the late 1800s, thereby making it a New South capital as well. Wilson suggests that the 'Richmond that built Monument Avenue thought of itself as the "first" city of the "New South"'.<sup>26</sup> Given the city's status as capital of both the Old and New South, Richmond's Monument Avenue served both as a remembrance of the past and a springboard to the future.

However, it is important to remember that the New South vision was one of prosperity for the white South only. The white New South vision advocated separation of the races, and it is within the era of the building of Monument Avenue that 'Jim Crow' laws went into effect in the region.<sup>27</sup> Monument Avenue's creation provided an image of the heroic white South, while ignoring the black South.

This racial division can be seen in the 1890 erection and unveiling of the Lee monument, on a site just west of the then Richmond city limits, which DuPriest and Tice correctly refer to as 'one of the grandest spectacles in Richmond history'.<sup>28</sup> However, not all Richmonders were pleased with this deification of Lee and the Lost Cause. Black community leader John Mitchell, Jr argued that city money should not go towards honouring the Confederate general, noting that the dedication ceremony 'handed a legacy of treason and blood' down to future generations.<sup>29</sup>

The statue became the focal point for a new suburban area, which included the building of Monument Avenue, a wide, extensively landscaped boulevard. From 1901



through to the late 1920s, numerous large expensive homes were built on the Avenue. In addition, four more Confederate monuments were unveiled (Davis and J.E.B. Stuart in 1907, Jackson in 1919 and Matthew Fontaine Maury in 1929).<sup>30</sup> By 1930, the Avenue had become Richmond's most wealthy and elegant street.

Monument Avenue continued as a symbol of white power and control in Richmond into the civil rights era. Writing about his boyhood years in 1950s Richmond, Arthur Ashe noted that the city's powerful white First Baptist Church 'confirmed its domination and its strict racial identity by its presence on Richmond's Monument Avenue, the avenue of Confederate heroes'.<sup>31</sup>

Proposals for Monument Avenue in the 1960s and 1970s were reflective of racial divisions in the city. By the 1960s, many white Richmonders were leaving the city for the suburbs. While the area around Monument Avenue was still predominantly white, the prestigious neighbourhood was considered to be on a downward trajectory. In response, the Richmond City Planning Commission in 1965 created a plan to refurbish the area, which called for greater landscaping of the Avenue and the addition of seven more Confederate statues west of the existing ones. At a time when whites were leaving for the suburbs and the city was locked in a bitter battle over school desegregation, the commission was sending a not so subtle plea for whites to remain by beautifying the setting for and calling for the building of many more monuments to an earlier Lost Cause. While the plan was not fully implemented (the statues were never built), the symbolism is clear.<sup>32</sup> Concerns about the future of Monument Avenue became overtly racial in 1977, when African Americans won a majority of seats on Richmond's city council for the first time. Before leaving office, the white majority city council deeded the Lee statue to the state, fearful that the new council would tear it down.<sup>33</sup>

Historic preservation efforts began in earnest on Monument Avenue in the 1970s, and in recent years for 'many homeowners, living on Monument was a means of reclaiming the past, of celebrating the history of an avenue that had itself been built to commemorate an era long gone'.<sup>34</sup> However, not all Richmonders celebrate Monument Avenue. The Avenue's signature Confederate monuments, while a symbol of a glorious past to some, are problematic because 'to many, and especially to African Americans, they symbolize an ignoble past'.<sup>35</sup> In 1991, black Richmond city councilman Chuck Richardson was interested in altering the Avenue's symbolism, proposing an integration of the Avenue by erecting statues of three black leaders (including two of Richmond civil rights heroes and one of then governor and Richmond native Douglas Wilder, the country's first black governor). Richardson suggested that the Avenue should reflect all aspects of the city's history, not just that of the Civil War, arguing that 'the beautiful statues on Monument Avenue stand in substantial measure for a society which believed in subjugation of the black race'. However, the proposal did not fare well, with many Richmond whites opposing the idea.<sup>36</sup> The following year, however, the city council passed a resolution stating that 'Monument Avenue was not the exclusive domain of Confederate Heroes'.<sup>37</sup>

## The life and death of Arthur Ashe

Before proceeding to the 1995 debate over the Arthur Ashe statue, it is necessary to examine briefly his life and death. Arthur Ashe was born in 1943 and grew up in then segregated Richmond. His childhood, including his tennis education, was dictated by segregation. Despite being one of Richmond's best teenage players, Ashe was not allowed to compete in the city's tennis tournaments or play on the city's best (whites only) courts. In 1960, he moved from Richmond to St Louis before his senior year in high school to improve his game. Ashe's experience growing up under segregation left him bitter. As he wrote in 1981:

When I decided to leave Richmond, I left all that Richmond stood for at the time – its segregation, its conservatism, its parochial thinking, its slow progress toward equality, its lack of opportunity for talented black people. I had no intention then of coming back. And I really never did, except to see my family, and for a few tournaments and a Davis Cup match years later.

Ashe noted in 1981 that his 'memories and experiences about Richmond remained firmly rooted in the 1960s'.<sup>38</sup> However, 12 years later he had modified his views, declaring that he had 'made peace with the state of Virginia and the South'.<sup>39</sup> While Ashe lived most of his adult life in New York, he did come back to Richmond frequently following his retirement from tennis. He was actively involved in improving the lives of Richmond's children, including founding 'Virginia Heroes', a mentoring programme for at-risk children. The city recognized Ashe's work by naming an athletic centre in his honour.

But it was Ashe's life outside Richmond that made him a national and world celebrity. A graceful player in an era of emotional tennis stars, Ashe became the first black male to win the US Open tennis tournament in 1968. The crowning achievement of his tennis career came in 1975, when he became the first black male to win the world's most prestigious tennis tournament, Wimbledon. A tennis star for over a decade, Ashe retired following a heart attack in 1979.

Ashe saw his tennis fame as opening the way to work for social justice. For over 20 years, his main cause was the ending of the apartheid regime in South Africa. His work was important and visible; so much so that Nelson Mandela said that when he was released from the Robben Island prison, the first American he wanted to meet was Ashe.<sup>40</sup> Ashe worked tirelessly in the US, especially as an advocate of education and disadvantaged inner-city children.

Arthur Ashe died in February 1993 from AIDS, acquired from tainted blood following open heart surgery. Once the disease was revealed, Ashe gave numerous public lectures on AIDS and started a foundation aimed at trying to end the disease. Though he had been retired from sport for many years, *Sports Illustrated* named Ashe their 'Sportsman of the Year' for 1992, recognizing his achievements not only in tennis but in philanthropy and human rights as well.<sup>41</sup>

Upon his death, Ashe's body was flown from New York to Richmond for burial. Over 5000 mourners viewed the body as it lay in state at the Executive Mansion (home of then Governor Wilder), while a similar number attended his funeral at the Ashe Athletic Center. Ashe was eulogized throughout Richmond as a hero.<sup>42</sup> Two columnists for Richmond's

leading newspaper, the *Times-Dispatch*, argued that Ashe was Virginia's most revered and respected modern hero and Richmond's most famous native.<sup>43</sup>

In the wake of his death, the question raised in Richmond was how best to honour Ashe's legacy. Richmond's white mayor, Walter Kenney, noted that while a segregationist Richmond was not willing to embrace Ashe, modern Richmond should honour Ashe, 'a giant'.<sup>44</sup> Suggestions for honouring Ashe included building an African American sports hall of fame based on Ashe's three-volume history of African American athletes (Ashe had discussed the project with Richmond officials), renaming a main Richmond street or expressway, and creating an Arthur Ashe state holiday.

## The 1995 Ashe debate

In 1992 Ashe met with Richmond sculptor Paul DiPasquale, who wanted to create a public sculpture of him. Shortly after Ashe's death, DiPasquale designed the statue following Ashe's suggestions. Approved by the Ashe family, the statue shows a casually dressed Ashe in a warm-up suit, surrounded by four children looking upwards at him. In Ashe's serving hand, held above his head, are books, while in his other and strategically placed lower hand is a tennis racquet.<sup>45</sup> The symbolism of the children and the placement of the hands was to reinforce Ashe's belief in the paramount importance of education. Virginia Heroes, the mentoring programme started by Ashe, took on the fundraising duties to make the statue a reality. Virginia Heroes and DiPasquale offered the statue to the city of Richmond, and city officials accepted. In December 1994, nearly two years after Ashe's death, DiPasquale and Virginia Heroes unveiled a model of the Ashe statue to kick off their fundraising efforts to finish the work.

While there was little public objection in Richmond to the idea of an Ashe statue, the question became of where it would be placed. Former Governor Wilder provoked controversy in December 1994 when he suggested that Ashe should be placed with the Confederate heroes along Monument Avenue.<sup>46</sup> Wilder's comments provoked debate over whether an African American or any non-Confederate hero could reside on the Avenue.

At its 19 June 1995 meeting, Richmond's city planning commission voted on the site for the Ashe statue. One week earlier, Virginia Heroes announced it would recommend that the commission place the statue on Monument Avenue. However, the organization's choice of the exact site of the statue, combined with the microgeographies of the Avenue, muted some of the potential criticism from those who would question placing Ashe on the same street as the Confederate statues. The Confederate statues are located on the eastern end of Monument Avenue, the first part of the Avenue built. The Monument Avenue historic district, which contains the five Confederate statues and the Avenue's most impressive buildings, runs for one and a half miles of the Avenue's five-mile length, from Lombardy Street to Roseneath Road, a 'cohesive area with a consistent road width, continuous plantings, and harmonious architecture'. West of Roseneath, while the earlier pattern retains some influence, the Avenue's character changes dramatically, becoming 'increasingly suburban in appearance', and 'no longer easily perceived as a majestic, in-town boulevard'.<sup>47</sup> Virginia Heroes' choice for the statue's location was on Monument between Kent Road and Hamilton Street, in this newer section of the Avenue, three

blocks west of Roseneath Road and the historic district. As important, the proposed location placed it one block west of where Monument Avenue crosses a major highway (Interstate 195), a significant break in the Avenue (Figure 3). The result of this proposed placement now would be that while Ashe would be on the same Avenue with the Confederates, he would be physically, temporally and symbolically separated from them.

The planning commission agreed to put the statue on Monument Avenue. However, they made a significant change in its exact location. The nine-member commission voted unanimously to place the statue three blocks to the east, at the intersection of Monument and Roseneath, at the edge of the historic district on the same side of the Interstate as the other monuments (and inside the spot, signified by a cannon, marking the Confederate's second line of defence during the Civil War battles for Richmond). Rather than being separated from the Confederate heroes by the highway, Ashe would stand with the Confederates inside their 'battle lines'. African American Richmond city manager Robert Bobb suggested the new site, comparing the location west of Interstate 195 to Jim Crow laws and the twentieth-century struggle for civil rights by arguing that 'the symbolism there would have been the statue was on the back of the bus. If all the other monuments were in the historic district, why not Ashe?' Placing Ashe closer to the Confederates, Bobb suggested, would 'show the difference between what Monument Avenue was in the past to what it represents in the future'. Reflecting on the city's history of racial division, Bobb argued that the unanimous vote by the five white and four African American commissioners demonstrated that 'Richmond is changing. We have changed . . . It does reflect that we're a city for all the people of different views . . . It's more than symbolic. It's real. This was a big day.'<sup>48</sup> Groundbreaking for the statue was set for 10 July (what would have been Arthur Ashe's 52nd birthday).

A public furore erupted over the commission's decision. After the vote, Richmond city hall received over 400 calls concerning the decision, with approximately 90 per cent against the statue's proposed location.<sup>49</sup> While the planning commission vote was the last hurdle necessary for the erection of the statue, given the uproar over the decision Richmond's city council postponed the groundbreaking and scheduled a 17 July public hearing to reconsider the decision.

The city council's action set off a month of debate over the proper location for the Ashe statue. Tied up in this issue were questions concerning Ashe's legacy, the symbolism of Monument Avenue, and how placing Ashe on Monument would reshape the Avenue's and the city's identity. A public opinion poll, conducted for the *Richmond times-dispatch* in mid-July, showed that by a three to one margin Richmond area residents did not want the Ashe statue to be located on Monument Avenue. However, it is important to note that the poll numbers did not neatly divide by race. While whites, by an almost four to one margin, did not want to see Ashe placed with the Confederates, African Americans also opposed the proposed location by a three to two margin (Table 1).<sup>50</sup> While a majority of both blacks and whites opposed the Monument Avenue location, their reasons differed greatly. By proposing that Ashe be memorialized on Monument, an established Confederate memorial space, the decision required not only an evaluation of Ashe's worthiness as a candidate for inclusion on the Avenue but also a *re-evaluation* of the worthiness of those already enshrined there.

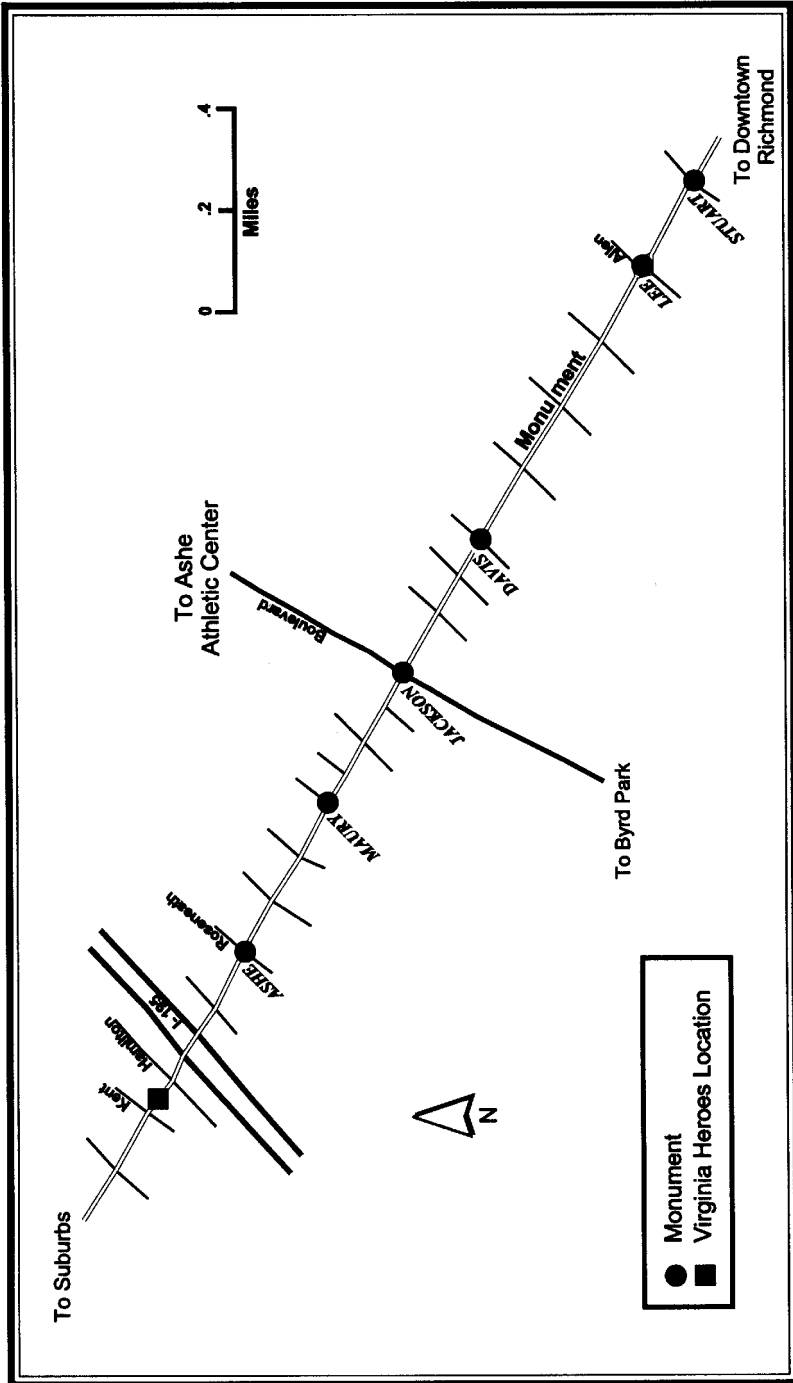


FIGURE 3 Location of monuments along Monument Avenue

TABLE 1 Richmond-area poll ‘Do you think that the Arthur Ashe statue belongs on Monument Avenue, or at some other location?’

	Monument Avenue (%)	Other location (%)	Don’t know/ no answer (%)
All respondents	22	64	14
Whites (of those with an opinion)	22	78	
African Americans (of those with an opinion)	41	59	

The poll was conducted for the *Richmond Times-Dispatch* 10–15 July 1995. The margin of error was +/- 5 percentage points. Source: M. Allen, ‘Many oppose Monument site’, *Richmond Times-Dispatch* (19 July 1995), p. A8.

The remainder of this paper examines the debate in more detail. The first section examines white opposition to placing the Ashe statue on Monument Avenue, followed, second, by a discussion of black opposition. The third section explores the reasoning of white and black proponents for wanting Ashe on Monument. Section four discusses the 17 July city council hearing and vote on the statue’s location, while section five looks at the vote’s aftermath and continued debate over the statue’s final location.

### White opposition

White opposition was typically based on three issues. First, there was an aesthetic concern that Ashe, dressed in warm-up sweats and untied sneakers, would be too casual and too incongruous on the same street with Confederate heroes in full battle dress. As one Monument Avenue resident who lived near the proposed location put it, the Ashe statue ‘would be modern art in a turn-of-the-century, trolley-car neighbourhood’.<sup>51</sup>

Other objections grounded in aesthetic rhetoric contained suggestions that as a coherent symbolic landscape honouring the Confederacy, Monument Avenue was worth preserving, and the Ashe statue would destroy that symbolism. This objection was not based on an evaluation of whether Ashe was worthy of veneration, but instead was based on a conviction that Monument Avenue was sacred Confederate space and the Confederacy still deserved veneration. As one opponent put it, ‘The statues on that street are dedicated to one cause and one single cause.’ Erect the Ashe statue and ‘you’ve destroyed the significance of the street’.<sup>52</sup> In this case, objecting to the Ashe statue was a call to preserve the Confederate symbolism.

This objection to the Ashe statue was accompanied on more than one occasion by the suggestion that if a statue were to be erected on Monument Avenue featuring an African

American, it should be one dedicated to African American Confederate soldiers. As one white opponent critical of placing Ashe on Monument noted, 'if there's a hidden political agenda to put an Afro-American on Monument Avenue, they ought to honor the blacks who fought for the Confederacy'. At the 17 July city council meeting, several opponents of the Ashe statue offered to make donations for an African American Confederate monument.<sup>53</sup> Whiteness is apparent in this case, as for these Ashe opponents the black Southern experience is only important insofar as it supports their white vision of Southern history and social relations (blacks could only be worthy of veneration if they supported the white Confederate cause). This suggestion of placing a black Confederate statue on Monument Avenue was made even though most credible historians question whether more than a handful of African Americans fought willingly for the Confederacy.<sup>54</sup>

A second objection among white opponents was based on judgements of Ashe's worthiness versus that of the Confederates. In this comparison, Ashe had not accomplished enough to deserve a place on Monument Avenue, and therefore could not share space with the gallant Confederate heroes. This line of thinking denied Ashe any greater significance than being a tennis star, thereby diminishing his humanitarian efforts. This theme was expressed in letters to the editor of the *Richmond Times-Dispatch*. As one letter writer put it: 'Let's put this man in true perspective: Arthur Ashe was simply a tennis star who won Wimbledon one time.' Or as another wrote, 'Ashe will forever stand as a giant in the world of sports. He will not be recorded in history books as one who changed the course of our nation as did those immortalized on Monument Avenue.'<sup>55</sup> While recognizing Ashe's accomplishments, another writer argued:

Ashe, by most accounts, was a nice guy and a good tennis player. I would stop short of calling him a 'hero' for being nice. A hero by most definitions is one who saves another's life. The addition of an Ashe statue would undermine the historic integrity of this famous street. The figures on Monument Avenue are heroes; this theme should be maintained. A tennis player joining the ranks of generals is simply ludicrous.<sup>56</sup>

One Confederate preservationist suggested to the city council at its 26 June meeting that the monument should be placed by a tennis court 'where he is most notably known'.<sup>57</sup> Or, as one letter writer to the *Times-Dispatch* put it,

True, he did a lot for tennis and was a nice person, and he inspired young people to make something good of their lives. Ashe's statue should be placed at the tennis courts . . . That would inspire more people to play tennis . . . There should not be a statue on Monument for any sports person, as I do not consider any of them heroes, unless they fought for our country. I always will think of Monument Avenue as showing our heritage to people from everywhere.<sup>58</sup>

Of course, these letters raise the question of whose heroes and whose heritage is being honoured, and underscore the white symbolism of the Monument Avenue landscape. The assumption made is that white Southern heroes *are* Southern heroes, and that white Southern heritage *is* Southern heritage. The black Southern experience is invisible.

A third line of reasoning heard from some whites was more overtly racial: they did not want a statue of a black man located in a predominantly white neighbourhood on the

same street with Confederate heroes. While the sentiment was certainly held, it was difficult to gauge how widespread it was because many who held this view would not openly express it.<sup>59</sup> The public comments along these lines ranged from measured to overtly racist. For example, the president of the Heritage Preservation Association, a neo-Confederate group based in Atlanta, argued that the avenue was 'hallowed ground' and that another location for the Ashe monument 'would pay the proper tribute to a great athlete, without violating the historic sensibilities of Richmond's Confederate-American population'.<sup>60</sup> On the other hand, a caller to a Richmond radio station commented: 'We need to protect our heritage . . . We don't need blacks on Monument Avenue . . . They've taken over our city; they've tried to take over our government. If you've got daughters like I've got daughters, they're trying to take them over, too.'<sup>61</sup>

### **Black opposition**

The 1995 debate over erecting statues on Monument Avenue differed from those in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century because whereas earlier Richmond's African American community had little say and no power in shaping the Avenue's symbolic landscape, black Richmonders played a major role in the 1995 Ashe debate given that Richmond was a black majority city with an African American mayor and an African American majority city council.

However, a majority of African Americans were *also* against placing Ashe on Monument Avenue. Their reasons for opposing the Monument Avenue site, though, differed significantly from that of whites. Some black Richmonders thought that Ashe was *too good* a person to be placed on the same street with those who fought for the Confederacy to preserve the Southern slave system, and that it would send the wrong signal by legitimizing the Confederate cause. Leading the way in this argument were Richmond's black Mayor, Leonidas Young, and Ray Boone, the editor/publisher of the city's leading African American newspaper, the *Richmond Free Press*. Young argued that Ashe would not be honoured by having his statue put 'in a place where it has been perceived that only white heroes go'.<sup>62</sup> In a *Free Press* editorial, Boone argued that Ashe deserved better than to be placed with those who fought to defend slavery. He noted that 'Monument Avenue was constructed for a perverted reason of glorifying losers, the pro-slavery Confederate army in the Civil War'. Boone argued that 'Monument Avenue . . . celebrates the worst in our history – traitors who fought against human freedom'. He noted that to place Ashe on the Avenue would wrongly legitimize the others enshrined; by placing the statue on Monument, 'you would be giving credence to the false proposition that these were heroes'.<sup>63</sup> Or, as one black opponent of the site put it succinctly, 'Arthur Ashe doesn't belong with those racists. What Monument Avenue needs is a bulldozer'.<sup>64</sup> Arguing that Ashe was too good to stand with the Confederates demonstrates an evaluation of the relative worthiness of both Ashe and the Confederates, in this case with Ashe being morally superior. Unlike some whites, who argued that placing Ashe on the Avenue would demean the hero status of the Confederates, some blacks argued that placing Ashe on the Avenue would demean the hero status of Ashe.

At the same time, some blacks thought the Ashe statue would be more appropriately



placed at Richmond's Byrd Park, site of the formerly whites only tennis courts where Ashe was not allowed to play while growing up. For black opponents, placing the statue at Byrd Park would be a sign of what both Ashe and Richmond had to overcome. On the day before the 17 July city council meeting, Mayor Young offered a compromise which included the Ashe statue being placed in Byrd Park. However, Councilman Richardson, a strong proponent of the Monument Avenue site, questioned placing Ashe at a tennis court (especially when this suggestion came from very vocal white opponents of the Monument Avenue site) for fear that it would perpetuate the stereotype that 'Blacks are good entertainers and sports people. Our talents go much further and Arthur is an example of that.'<sup>65</sup>

However, as suggested earlier, Ashe saw his tennis fame as giving him an opportunity to pursue his philanthropic and humanitarian interests. Sculptor DiPasquale was against the Byrd Park site because Ashe had told him: 'I want to make sure I'm not just remembered as a good tennis player.' Ashe's brother, Johnnie, was also against the Byrd Park site because he argued those tennis courts held no symbolic value to his brother. However, one person was so eager to see the monument go at Byrd Park (and not on Monument Avenue) that they called DiPasquale shortly before the 17 July city council meeting and offered to pay the entire cost of completing the monument, \$400 000, if DiPasquale agreed to put the monument at Byrd Park.<sup>66</sup>

Others argued that by being placed in the predominantly white Fan District neighbourhood, the Monument Avenue site would diminish the impact the statue would have in inspiring black children. Some argued that it made no sense to place Ashe in a neighbourhood where he would not have been welcomed when he was growing up. Or, as one black opponent argued, the statue should be put in the poor neighbourhood where Ashe grew up, 'so that poor kids coming up could see where he came from . . . Folks on Monument Avenue don't need to be encouraged.' Supporters tried to counter this message by arguing that Ashe transcended race. As the white leader of Virginia Heroes noted, 'Some African-Americans are saying that Arthur should be with his people. But Arthur Ashe was for all the people.'<sup>67</sup>

At the 19 June planning commission meeting, a white opponent of the Monument Avenue site suggested that the Commission should 'target it [the statue] where it does the most good' and place it in the black community. However, the idea that Ashe should be located in a black neighbourhood, thus having a segregating rather than integrating effect, aroused the ire of black supporters of the Monument Avenue site when it was voiced by white opponents. Black Commissioner Terone Green argued that the debate should not be about whether the white or black community were to receive the statue; instead, 'we need to come together'. He noted that if the Ashe statue was placed on Monument, then maybe more black children would visit the Avenue, and it would have more meaning to them. He noted that when he grew up in Richmond, 'If I had seen a black figure, that would have been more to me than seeing a bunch of horses and a cannon.'<sup>68</sup> A leading black *Richmond Times-Dispatch* columnist, Michael Paul Williams, argued that this line of reasoning was one of the 'most disquieting aspects' of the debate, noting:

This thinking has no place in 1995, particularly regarding a figure as cosmopolitan and universally respected as Ashe. The segregation that afflicted Ashe during his lifetime has no place in discussions of how to treat his memorial. And besides: Who says black kids don't travel on Monument Avenue? And who says white kids can't benefit as much from the lessons of Ashe's life? The value he placed on education. His determination in the face of racism. The sportsmanship he displayed on the tennis court. His concern for the oppressed. His courage in the face of a deadly disease. Ashe should be a hero for all of Richmond, not just black people.<sup>69</sup>

## **Proponents**

Proponents of the Monument Avenue site dismissed both white and black objections, arguing that placing the Ashe statue on Monument was the right thing to do. Proponents argued that, given the powerful symbolism imbued in Monument Avenue, it was the only logical site for the statue and would send a strong message about the ending of racial divisions in Richmond. However, in arguing for Ashe's inclusion, proponents had to change the dominant discourse concerning the symbolism of the Avenue. First, the leading proponent of the site, former Governor Wilder, argued that Monument Avenue was a heroic landscape dedicated to all Virginians, not just white Confederate Virginians. Wilder argued that 'Virginia's place to be recognized by Virginians is Monument Avenue.' Once he had made this argument, he then asked: 'when you look to see Virginians who have made contributions and not see a single person of African descent, what does it say?'<sup>70</sup> Thus Wilder attempted to change the dominant discourse from Monument Avenue being a landscape dedicated to heroic Confederates to a landscape dedicated to heroic Virginians, and thereafter to argue it was inexcusable that no black Virginian had been so recognized.

If the Avenue was to represent famous Virginians rather than famous Confederates, the next step was to argue that Ashe was deserving of being so honoured. While white opponents continued to emphasize Ashe's athletic side in denying him a spot on Monument, proponents looked at all of his accomplishments, arguing that along with his path-breaking role in athletics, his role as a human rights activist and philanthropist made him eligible for enshrinement. Thomas Chewning, the white co-chair of the monument's fund-raising effort, a prominent Virginia business executive and a top teenage tennis player in Richmond unable to play Ashe in tennis tournaments because of segregation, argued that Ashe 'was a real moral leader . . . one of the exceptional people of our time . . . What he stood for is what is best in all of us', and that Ashe belonged 'in the same paragraph' with Gandhi and King. Councilman Richardson argued that Ashe deserved to be commemorated on Monument, noting that, unlike the Confederates, 'Arthur didn't ride a horse, and he didn't shoot guns. But Arthur Ashe was a hero. He was a warrior to many people. He was a fighter. Arthur Ashe . . . has already earned his right on Monument Avenue, whether we put him there or not.'<sup>71</sup>

However, to suggest that Ashe's hero status qualified him for inclusion on Monument Avenue was at least to tacitly accept the dominant discourse that Lee, Jackson, Davis, Stuart and Maury were heroes as well. As Martinez argues, 'a particularly powerful kind

of hegemony seems to be at work when a master narrative . . . emerges intact even from intentionally subversive readings'.<sup>72</sup> In this case, while white opponents were appalled by claims that Ashe could be a hero on a par with the Confederates, at least Ashe's proponents were tacitly arguing that the Confederates were heroes nonetheless. Wilder tried to finesse this issue by making a temporal distinction between the hero status of Ashe and the Confederates, arguing that it was important for Ashe to be on the Avenue with the Confederates because the Confederates memorialized on the avenue 'are heroes from an era which would deny the aspirations of an Arthur Ashe. He would stand with them, saying, "I, too, speak for Virginia".'<sup>73</sup>

Another argument forwarded for Ashe's inclusion on Monument Avenue was that it would desegregate Richmond's most famous symbolic landscape and signal that African Americans were equals in Richmond. In first suggesting the Monument Avenue location, Wilder suggested that the location would 'send a transcending message'. Councilman Richardson argued that placing Ashe on Monument would 'bring racial justice to Monument Avenue'. He reasoned that to have a humanitarian and anti-apartheid activist such as Ashe integrate the row of Confederates would be a fitting symbol of Richmond's civil rights history, noting the 'hand-me-down ideals those individuals represent is the very thing that chased Arthur out of this city. The Civil War is part of our history. Now we have another part – civil rights . . . For Arthur to take his final stand in the midst of what he has always fought, I think it would be fitting.'<sup>74</sup>

The staunchest press supporter of the Monument Avenue location was *Times-Dispatch* columnist Michael Paul Williams. He argued that while Monument Avenue may be a source of pride for white Richmonders,

the time has come for people to acknowledge the anguish that Monument Avenue's symbolism has inflicted on black Richmonders. And to accept the fact that, for many of us, the strip is not hallowed ground but a painful reminder of black subjugation. White Richmonders must also accept the fact that in a predominantly black city, it is inappropriate to reserve a street for a cause many residents find offensive.

To Williams, Monument Avenue represented a major segregationist hurdle to overcome: 'we've put a black man [Wilder] in the governor's mansion. But Monument Avenue is another matter.' Placing Ashe on Monument would signal a major step in creating an integrated society. Williams noted that:

with checkered success, we've desegregated schools, governments, businesses and neighbourhoods. But the Bronze Club on Monument Avenue remains resistant to change. The sentiment may as well be etched in stone: 'Whites Only.' Arthur Ashe was stymied by a racist Richmond. Let's not plant his monument amid the shabby trappings of segregation, '90s style. We can't afford to repeat past mistakes. The world is watching.'<sup>75</sup>

### ***The city council decision***

The 17 July city council's public hearing lasted seven hours; approximately 100 persons spoke, divided almost equally between proponents and opponents, at a packed council chamber with local, national and international media in attendance. The tone for the

meeting was set by Mayor Young, who opened the meeting by stating that the debate over the placement of the Ashe statue was

an important discussion about some of the most essential questions of our collective identity – the meaning of our traditions and symbols, the nature of heroism, the relation between our white and African-American populations and the function of public art in expressing the soul of a community.<sup>76</sup>

Going into the meeting, the mayor and vice-mayor were in agreement on a compromise plan that would place the Ashe statue at Byrd Park.<sup>77</sup> They believed that five of the nine members of the council agreed with their position of keeping Ashe off Monument Avenue. The public forum swayed the council, however, so that in the end they voted 7–0 with one abstention to place Ashe at Monument Avenue and Roseneath Road.

Several council members admitted that statements made at the hearing changed their votes. Three sets of comments helped swing the vote in favor of the Monument site. First, opening statements by Ashe's family indicating their desire to see the monument placed on Monument Avenue strongly influenced the council. The first speaker at the hearing was Ashe's brother, Johnnie, who spoke on behalf of the dozen family members who sat in the front row. Johnnie Ashe argued that the family was solidly in favour of the Monument Avenue site, including Ashe's widow, Jeanne Moutoussamy-Ashe. He argued that, as Richmond's premier street, Monument Avenue was well maintained by the city and the statue deserved to be placed in the nicest environment possible. He reiterated that placing the statue at Byrd Park held no symbolism for his brother, and placing the statue there would put too much emphasis on Arthur Ashe as a tennis player. Finally, he put the vote into the greater context of race and Richmond, arguing before the Council, 'Will this become a modern-day war of hypocrisy, or will the city of Richmond do the right thing?' The views of the Ashe family were not fully known prior to the hearing, and at least one council member admitted being swayed by the statements.<sup>78</sup>

Second, the comments of one speaker at the hearing on the significance of what the statue would mean if placed on Monument Avenue versus Byrd Park were widely reported as further cementing opinion in favour of the Monument Avenue site. This speaker argued, 'If you put him in Byrd Park, years from now, people will say Arthur Ashe must have been a great tennis player. If you put him on Monument Avenue, people will say he was a great man.'<sup>79</sup>

A third issue that swayed one councilman was the statements by several 'born and bred' white Richmonders who alluded to the idea that placing Ashe on Monument would 'somehow diminish the quality of life here'. Responding to such racist comments, councilman Larry Chavis voted for the Monument site, noting: 'I knew that my vote against Monument Avenue would condone that mentality.'<sup>80</sup>

After the vote, members of the council noted their opinions of the decision's significance. Councilman Timothy Kaine, who going into the meeting was reported to be backing the mayor's compromise proposal, argued that their vote would 'symbolically open up Monument Avenue'. Others read larger significance into the decision. Councilman Richardson argued that the vote was 'a symbolic move forward for Richmond

and for America'. Mayor Young argued that placing Ashe on Monument would help honour all of Richmond's African Americans who helped build the city. As he noted after the vote, 'A city has been healed. I hear voices crying from graves and I feel the spirit of people who have never properly been recognized.' Johnnie Ashe looked at the vote both as a way of honouring his brother and as a symbol for Richmond: 'I am elated, first because the city of Richmond had the chance to move forward and second, because Arthur will be honored.'<sup>81</sup>

### **City council vote aftermath**

However, despite the city council decision and an August 1995 groundbreaking, attempts were still made to keep the Ashe statue off Monument Avenue. The city council vote did not settle the public debate over the meaning of Ashe, the Confederates and Monument Avenue.

Continued objection to the Monument Avenue site crystallized around a 1 January 1996 op-ed piece in the *Richmond Times-Dispatch* published by Arthur Ashe's widow, Jeanne Moutoussamy-Ashe (her first public comments on the debate):

No, I am not in agreement with the decision to place the 'Arthur Ashe monument' on Monument Avenue. My reasons are not politically driven; nor are they artistically or racially motivated. I have always felt that in all this controversy, the spirit that Arthur gave to Richmond has been overlooked. I am afraid that a statue of Arthur Ashe on Monument Avenue honours Richmond, Virginia, more than it does its son, his legacy, and his life work.<sup>82</sup>

Instead, Moutoussamy-Ashe wanted Richmond to redouble its efforts towards building the African American sports hall of fame that Ashe had proposed shortly before his death, and argued that the statue should be placed in front of the hall. In making her argument, she tried to divert attention from the dominant reading of the statue, that the statue's meaning was about race and Richmond, and argue instead that it should be about Ashe's legacy.

Moutoussamy-Ashe's statements reinvigorated debate over the 17 July decision. While supporters of the Monument Avenue site criticized her position and her entry into the debate at such a late date, opponents of the statue and its location resurfaced in response to her objection.<sup>83</sup> For example, as noted above, Mayor Young opposed the Monument Avenue site. Rather than contributing to racial healing, Young feared that putting the statue on Monument Avenue could inflame racial animosity. Instead, Young wanted to use the statue as a tool to pursue economic development. He proposed creating an Arthur Ashe Festival Park and/or an Ashe-inspired African American sports hall of fame in downtown Richmond and placing the statue there.<sup>84</sup> In the process, Young hoped that the park, located on the site of two large abandoned department stores, would spark a revitalization of the struggling downtown.

On 4 January, three days after Moutoussamy-Ashe's comments, Young reiterated his call for the hall of fame to be built downtown with the statue placed in front of it. On 8 January, Young announced that a compromise had been reached: Moutoussamy-Ashe would assist in efforts to help raise the \$20 million necessary to build the hall of fame.

DiPasquale's Ashe statue would be placed on Monument Avenue until the Hall was built. Once built, DiPasquale's Ashe would be moved to the hall of fame, and an international design competition would be held for a statue honouring Ashe and other African Americans which would go at the intersection of Monument and Roseneath. Besides trying to reach a compromise that would satisfy all concerned, placing the Ashe statue, at least temporarily, on Monument was done in order to satisfy those who feared that this latest debate was merely a cover to keep a black person off the Avenue.<sup>85</sup>

In the end the compromise fell apart, with race being a major factor. In March 1996, Citizens for Excellence in Public Art (CEPA), a group of 29 gallery owners and local arts patrons who had criticized the artistic merit of DiPasquale's Ashe and lobbied for an international design competition, asked the city council for 'an irrevocable contractual agreement' for the winner of their Ashe statue competition to be placed at Monument and Roseneath whether or not the African American sports hall of fame was built, effectively ceding control to CEPA. In response the city council ended CEPA's efforts by criticizing them for having only one African American in their group, and therefore giving the appearance of not being inclusive. In addition, several members of the Council felt that DiPasquale's Ashe, the hall of fame and the city-built Ashe Athletic Center were enough tributes to Ashe. As Councilman Anthony Jones put it, 'I feel I will have been slighted' if a fourth Ashe memorial were to be erected yet none were to be designated for other worthy African Americans.<sup>86</sup> The city council decided that if the sports hall of fame was never built, DiPasquale's Ashe would remain on Monument Avenue. Two years later, the hall of fame idea died, meaning that DiPasquale's Ashe would remain on Monument Avenue.<sup>87</sup>

Ashe's statue was unveiled at the intersection of Monument and Roseneath in July 1996 before 1500 persons (including two dozen protesters with Confederate flags). Speaking to the crowd, former Governor Wilder declared Monument Avenue was now 'an avenue for *all* people . . . Today, I feel more pride and relevance in being here on Monument Avenue than I have at any time in my life.' The statue was a major attraction for both tourists and African American Richmond residents, with a police spokesperson noting, one month after its unveiling, that it was 'the most photographed monument on the avenue'.<sup>88</sup>

## Conclusions

The vitriolic debate over whether to erect a statue of Arthur Ashe on Richmond's Monument Avenue was more than a discussion simply over where to place a statue. Instead, the debates focused on fundamental issues of race, power and identity in late twentieth-century Richmond. The debate over the meaning and future of Monument Avenue provides an excellent example of Schein's argument that the cultural landscape can be a reflection and component of a racial project. For a century, Monument Avenue has been a prime white racialized landscape. Many white opponents of the Ashe statue wanted to preserve the Avenue as a proud white symbol of 'Southern' heritage, dedicated to those who fought to preserve the 'Southern way of life' during the Civil War.

However, the debate was more complex than simply whites defending their white landscape while African Americans wanted it altered, as a majority of African Americans, according to the July 1995 poll, also objected to Ashe being placed on Monument. However, rather than accept the white objectors' view that Monument Avenue was a landscape of Southern heritage to be revered, black opponents worked to make apparent the whiteness of the Avenue, and then worked to decentre its position by arguing that the Avenue's meaning was to be abhorred. Rather than seeing Monument Avenue as a symbol to be cherished, African American opponents argued that the Avenue's symbolism was something of which they wanted no part.

Black and white proponents of the Monument Avenue location also made visible and then decentred the whiteness of the Avenue. However, rather than arguing that the Avenue was a white heroic landscape that by definition excluded African Americans, they argued that the street should stand for the heroism of both whites and blacks, thus attempting to transform the Avenue into a multiracial symbolic landscape. Indeed, the fact that in the end a coalition of black and white members of the city council were able to come together in the face of opposition from white and black opponents suggests the possibility of such future coalitions and the possibility that a multiracial identity can be forged. This would be a change in a city in which, Barone and Ujifusa observe, concerning Richmond's white and black citizens, 'there remains a gulf between these two separate cultures, connected but still not unified'.<sup>89</sup> However, the 17 July city council vote placing the Ashe statue on Monument Avenue did not end the debate over Richmond's public memory. The continuation of the debate in early 1996 signified that the meaning of this symbolic landscape was still not settled, and would likely be subject to further debate and redefinition.

That such a debate over Monument Avenue occurred in the first place also suggests changes in power relationships in Richmond. Unlike the 1890s, African Americans had an important voice in the 1990s debate, and this speaks to the growing political power of blacks within the city. The Ashe debate supports the point that the meanings of monuments and the landscapes in which they are situated are never settled and are always open to contestation. While the debate centred on the worthiness of Ashe to be placed on Monument Avenue and on how the placement of the statue would transform the Avenue's meaning and symbolism, it also revolved around a re-evaluation of the worthiness of the Confederates already enshrined on the Avenue, whose hero status had gone virtually unchallenged for a century. The fact that the hero status of sacred white Southern icons could be publically debated also suggests changes in power.

The intensity of the Ashe debate illustrates the importance of iconography and landscape in society. While councilwoman Shirley Harvey chided Richmonders at the 17 July city council hearing for being more vocal about the location of a statue than they were about important issues such as crime, economic development and education, the intensity of the debate demonstrates the importance with which society invests these symbols. As the *Richmond Afro-American* commented after the 17 July city council hearing, 'Richmonders bared their innermost feelings . . . What was revealed about the heart and politics of Richmond was not always flattering.'<sup>90</sup> While the literal debate was over statues, these statues hold deep symbolic meaning for Richmond's citizens as the



city and the region of the South attempts to untangle and reformulate its complex multicultural identity.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> K. Edwards, E. Howard and T. Prawl, *Monument Avenue: history and architecture* (Washington, US Dept of the Interior, National Park Service, Cultural Resources, Historical American Building Survey, 1992); J. Winberry, '“Lest we forget”: the Confederate monument and the Southern townscape', *Southeastern geographer* **23** (1983), pp. 107–21; G. Foster, *Ghosts of the Confederacy: defeat, the Lost Cause, and the emergence of the New South* (New York, Oxford University Press, 1987).
- <sup>2</sup> C. Wilson, *Judgement and grace in Dixie: Southern faiths from Faulkner to Elvis* (Athens, University of Georgia Press, 1995), p. 20; C. Wilson, *Baptized in blood: the religion of the Lost Cause* (Athens, University of Georgia Press, 1980), p. 29.
- <sup>3</sup> Edwards *et al.*, *Monument Avenue*, p. xiii.
- <sup>4</sup> J. Tooley, 'Boulevard of broken dreams', *US news & world report* (11 Nov. 1991), p. 24.
- <sup>5</sup> Wilson, *Judgement and grace*; J. Cobb, *Redefining Southern culture* (Athens, University of Georgia Press, 1999); On the controversies over the flying of Confederate flags, see G. Webster and R. Webster, 'The power of an icon', *Geographical review* **84** (1994), pp. 131–43; J. Leib, 'Heritage versus hate: a geographical analysis of Georgia's Confederate flag debate', *Southeastern geographer* **35** (1995), pp. 37–57; J. Leib, 'Teaching controversial topics: iconography and the Confederate battle flag in the South', *Journal of geography* **97** (1998), pp. 229–40; G. Webster and J. Leib, 'Whose South is it anyway? Race and the Confederate battle flag in South Carolina', *Political geography* **20** (2001), pp. 271–99; J. Leib, G. Webster and R. Webster, 'Rebel with a cause? Iconography and public memory in the Southern United States', *GeoJournal* **52** (2000), pp. 303–10; on the renaming of streets for Dr Martin Luther King, Jr, see D. Alderman, 'A street fit for a King: naming places and commemoration in the American South', *Professional geographer* **52** (2000), pp. 672–84; on the placement of civil rights memorials, see O. Dwyer, 'Interpreting the civil rights movement: place, memory, and conflict', *Professional geographer* **52** (2000), pp. 660–71.
- <sup>6</sup> R. Merelman, *Representing black culture: racial conflict and cultural politics in the United States* (New York, Routledge, 1995).
- <sup>7</sup> e. g. J. Gottman, 'Geography and international relations', *World politics* **3** (1951), pp. 153–73; J. Gottman, 'The political partitioning of our world: an attempt at analysis', *World politics* **4** (1952), pp. 512–19; A. Boime, *The unveiling of the national icons* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 2.
- <sup>8</sup> R. Schein, 'The place of landscape: a conceptual framework for interpreting an American scene', *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* **87** (1997), p. 660.
- <sup>9</sup> D. Mitchell, *The lie of the land: migrant workers and the California landscape* (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1996), p. 27.
- <sup>10</sup> K. Savage, 'The politics of memory: black emancipation and the Civil War monument', in J. Gillis, ed., *Commemorations: the politics of national identity* (Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press, 1994), p. 135.
- <sup>11</sup> N. Johnson, 'Cast in stone: monuments, geography and nationalism', *Environment and planning D* **13** (1995), p. 62; see also N. Johnson, 'Sculpting heroic histories: celebrating the centenary of the 1798 rebellion in Ireland', *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* n. s. **19** (1994), pp. 51–65; N. Johnson, 'The renaissance of Nationalism', in R. Johnston, P. Taylor,



- and M. Watts, eds., *Geographies of global change* (Oxford, Blackwell, 1995), pp. 97–110.
- <sup>12</sup> J. Bodnar, *Remaking America: public memory, commemoration, and patriotism in the twentieth century* (Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press, 1992); J. Bodnar, 'Public memory in an American city: commemoration in Cleveland', in J. Gillis, ed., *Commemorations: the politics of national identity* (Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press, 1994), pp. 74–89. See also D. Haydon, *The power of place: urban landscape as public history* (Cambridge, MA, MIT Press, 1995); J.K. Olick and D. Levy, 'Collective memory and cultural constraint: Holocaust myth and rationality in German politics', *American sociological review* **62** (1997), pp. 921–36; M. Sturkin, *Tangled memories: the Vietnam War, the AIDS epidemic and the politics of remembering* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1997); L.P. Spillman, *Nation and commemoration: creating national identities in the United States and Australia* (New York, Cambridge University Press, 1997); D. DeLyser, 'Authenticity on the ground: engaging the past in a California ghost town', *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* **89** (1999), pp. 602–32; K. Till, 'Staging the past: landscape designs, cultural identity and the Erinnerungspolitik at Berlin's Neue Wache', *Ecumene* **6** (1999), pp. 251–83.
- <sup>13</sup> Schein, 'The place of landscape', p. 662.
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- <sup>15</sup> e.g. P. Jackson and J. Penrose, eds, *Constructions of race, place and nation* (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1994); M. Omi and H. Winant, *Racial formation in the United States from the 1960s to the 1990s*, 2nd edn (New York, Routledge, 1994); A. Bonnett, 'Constructions of "race", place and discipline: geographies of "racial" identity and racism', *Ethnic and racial studies* **19** (1996), pp. 864–83; S. Cornell and D. Hartmann, *Ethnicity and race: making identities in a changing world* (Thousand Oaks, CA, Pine Forge Press, 1998).
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- <sup>57</sup> Quoted in 'City Council to hear people on memorial', *Richmond Free Press* (29 June–1 July 1995), p. A5.
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- <sup>59</sup> Hickey, 'Statue's path', p. A3.
- <sup>60</sup> Quoted in Allen, 'Monument site', p. A5. Though having argued this, city councilwoman Shirley Harvey wanted to know, 'Where is the hallowed ground for black people who have suffered and died?' (Quoted in 'Ashe family credited for winning vote', *Richmond Free Press* (20–22 July 1995), p. 5).
- <sup>61</sup> Quoted in Baker, 'Richmond to honour Ashe', p. A8.
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- <sup>63</sup> Quotations taken from 'City council', *Richmond Free Press*, p. 5; 'Advantage who?', *Economist* (15 July 1995), p. 20; M. Edds, 'Clashing views on Ashe memorial', *Richmond Free Press* (13–15 July 1995), p. 4.
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