

Thinking through Monuments

Episode IV

West African Masquerade

West African masquerade practices are a long-standing animist tradition throughout the region. Used in various contexts such as marriage, funerals, and initiation rites, the masks can serve as a spiritual vehicle to attain a closer connection to ancestors. Although masquerade practices have waned with the adoption of other religions such as Islam and Christianity in West Africa, there are active practitioners and organizers working to preserve the customs and traditions through efforts such as International Festival of Masks (FESTIMA) in Burkina Faso.

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Columbus Statue – Baltimore

The figure of Christopher Columbus exemplifies the ever-shifting perspectives on history and monuments. While many Columbus statues have been erected as a symbol of Italian American pride in the US, this glorification of Columbus has come under scrutiny given his monumental role in the murder and displacement of indigenous peoples in the Americas. In recent years, such statues have been subject to attack and/or removal as was the case in Baltimore in the summer of 2020. The Italian American community in Baltimore is now trying to preserve this toppled icon.

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The Afterlife of a Monument

Many places throughout the world are grappling with the question of what to do with or where to put statues or monuments once they are toppled. Whether the monument celebrates Communism in the former Soviet Union or the Confederacy in the US, there is never a clear answer. Some have created museums to recontextualize their significance, while others have discarded or hid them in storage. Can there be an afterlife for such monuments?

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↗ <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1343784>.

*Karyn Olivier refers to Saidiya Hartman’s *Lose Your Mother* to discuss her ideas of the afterlife of a monument.

- Hartman, Saidiya. *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route*.
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