

A Stone and a Hard Place

Memorialization and Marginalization in The Wake of Stone Mountain

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Introduction

The Confederate monument at Stone Mountain feels out of place in a neighborhood that is 85% Black. **Why is the narrative that has been literally set in stone, one that seems in direct opposition to most of Stone Mountain’s population?** Past frustration felt by ancestors of the Confederacy and the past and present trauma due to racial violence against Black residents are felt and remembered viscerally. In both cases, state actions initiated and preserved the trauma creating a cycle still relevant today.

Motivations

- Show the complexities of Stone Mountain’s impact
- Better support the communities that define Georgia's vibrant cultural landscape
- Bring attention to the legacies of classism that define the perception of the American South



Sources & References

Photos by Steve Eberhardt, 2016

In The Wake, Christina Sharpe, 2016

The Cultural Politics of Emotion, Sara Ahmed, 2004

Google Trends Data, accessed March 2024

Daughters of the Confederacy Website, accessed March 2024

Black History in the Wake of Stone Mountain

The Rock Stone Mountain rally was organized by various white supremacist and neo-Confederate groups at Stone Mountain Park to protest what they saw as efforts to remove Confederate symbols from public spaces. Hundreds of counter-protesters confronted the few dozen neo-Confederates and the Georgia State Patrol. **Nine of the counter-protestors were arrested, and the demonstration ended with the organizers being escorted out of the park.**



- After the Civil War, Black populations were not free from systemic oppression, they were simply subject to a new form of it.
- Additionally, terrorist groups like the KKK formed in opposition to Black success.
- Legislation and violence worked hand in hand to keep the Black population in the South impoverished.

Christina Sharpe’s framework as outlined in *In The Wake*, **which focuses on ongoing and cyclical impacts of the past**, can be applied to the pattern that sees the police protecting white supremacist protesters in 2016 at a monument where the KKK was reborn a century before.

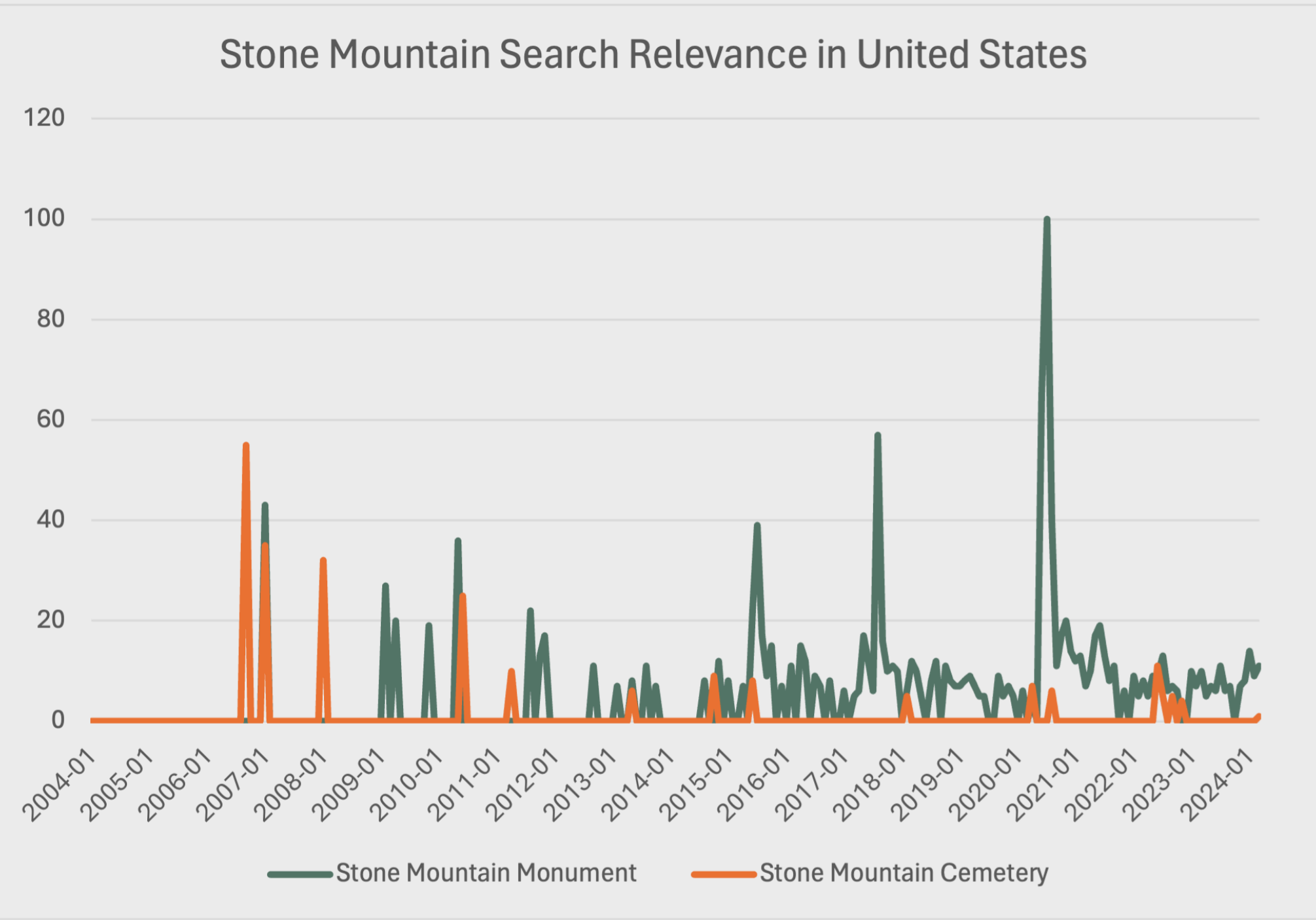


Whiteness & Poverty Weaponized

“I came into this world with the blood of a soldier in my veins...a soldier who may have had nothing more to leave behind to me and to those who come after me except in heritage... a heritage so rich in honor and glory that it far surpasses any material wealth that could be mine.”

Mary Nowlin Moon, June 2, 1915

- After the Civil War, Confederate veterans were sent back into society with very limited support networks from the federal government.
- Groups like the United Daughters of the Confederacy form in this timeframe, largely with the goal of aiding Confederate families.
- The groups shift towards being **against** civil rights movements rather than **for** the Confederate families.



Within the neo-Confederate movement, emotions such as pride, nostalgia, and resentment are circulated to create a specific Southern identity defined by white supremacy. In her book *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (2004), Sara Ahmed discusses how emotions are personal, political, and cultural. She explores how **certain emotions, such as anger or fear, can be mobilized in political contexts**, shaping identities and power dynamics. In this case, the original group of disenfranchised Confederate soldiers who shared those feelings of anger and fear became defined by them which manifested as hatred towards the black people they blame for this perceived loss. Today, when neo-Confederates defend the carving, they see efforts to remove Confederate symbols or challenge white supremacist narratives as threats to their identity.

Conclusions

Stone Mountain's significance today is not only as a stunning natural feature, but it has also been made into a cultural monument and icon. By engaging with its history, we can promote dialogues that foster growth. **We want to recognize that the American South's identity extends beyond racism; acknowledging the deep-seated legacies of classism is crucial, as it has ensnared Southerners – Black and White alike – into cycles of poverty.** **We also want to recognize that the trauma endured by Black communities is long lasting, ongoing, and cyclical, and to address Stone Mountains meaning, particular care must be paid to this reality.** There is a way to acknowledge the mistreatment of poor white Southerners after the Civil War without forcing the resident black community to be constantly reminded of the people who contributed to their historic and ongoing oppression.

Solutions & Final Notes

On a large scale, the removal of the Stone Mountain monument that stands as a monument to white supremacy would be ideal. However, removing the carving from the face of Stone Mountain is a long term and expensive goal. Some steps have been taken to remove some of the more inflammatory imagery from the park. On a smaller scale, several measures could help paint a clearer picture. The memorial that recognizes the struggles of both the White and Black communities is the **Stone Mountain Cemetery**. It should receive more attention than the monument. Additionally, the park should **partner with local school districts** to foster public understanding and provide context for the monument.

Engaging with diverse perspectives will help usher Stone Mountain into the modern era. **We want to encourage historically inclusive narratives in a way that acknowledges inequality to help understand the race and class-based oppression prevalent in the region today.**

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