

Confederacy Now, Confederacy Always: White Power Future-Pasts and/as Performative Time

By Rebecca Jackson, PhD

This presentation examines Confederate performative time as a mechanism perpetuating white supremacy in contemporary American identity. Through the Confederate Memorial Day celebration at Beauvoir, it explores how commemorative practices embody and transmit Confederate ideologies, aligning them with American Christian nationalism and reinforcing racial hierarchies across generations.



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Introduction to Confederate Performative Time

Definition of Confederate Performative Time

Confederate performative time layers past, present, and future, allowing Confederate ideologies to persist as living cultural memories.

Significance of Performative Time

This concept enables past Confederate values to remain active in present identities, reinforcing the cultural significance of Confederate narratives.

Example of Performative Time in Action

Dylan Mears's address at a Confederate event frames the audience as 'the living stones, the living memorials, the living monuments to our Confederate ancestors,' transforming them into symbols of Confederate continuity.

Beauvoir We Are the Living Stones.



future what is the meaning of these
Stones that's what we are



1:03 / 1:47

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Tracy C. Davis and Performative Time



Key Theorist: Tracy C. Davis

Tracy C. Davis introduces performative time as a way in which events from the past can simultaneously inform the present and anticipate the future.



Concept of 'Future-Pasts'

Davis's theory applies directly to Confederate commemorations, where each act of commemoration revitalizes Confederate ideologies in contemporary contexts as 'future-pasts.'



Audience Participation

Mears's invocation of the audience as 'living stones' exemplifies this layering, transforming the spectators into participants who are tasked with sustaining the Confederate legacy.

Rebecca Schneider and Performance Remains

Key Theorist: Rebecca Schneider

Rebecca Schneider's work focuses on how performances and their legacies persist over time, challenging traditional notions of temporality.

Concept: Performance Remains

Schneider introduces the idea of 'performance remains,' which posits that performances do not vanish after they conclude but instead leave traces that can be revisited and reinterpreted.

Relevance to Confederate Heritage

In the context of Confederate heritage, Schneider's theory illustrates how commemorations act as a 'living archive,' preserving and transmitting ideological memory across generations.

Example: Wreath-Laying Ceremony

An example is seen in the young girl laying a wreath at the event, dressed in Confederate mourning attire, embodying a ritual that ensures the perpetuation of Confederate ideology.

**Rebecca Schneider and
Performance Remains**



Strange Nostalgia and Fantastical Confederate Heritage

Strange Nostalgia

Strange nostalgia allows participants to view the Confederacy through a romanticized lens, detaching it from the realities of slavery and oppression.

Fantastical Memory

Karen L. Cox's term 'fantasy-as-history' describes how Confederate heritage groups reframe the Civil War as a noble defense of Southern honor.

Ideological Distortion

Saidiya Hartman and Kirk Savage discuss how memory and history can be distorted to serve ideological ends, reinforcing white power ideologies.



Critical Ethnography and Co-Performance as Methodology

Co-performative witnessing, developed by Dwight Conquergood and D. Soyini Madison, emphasizes shared vulnerability and empathy in cultural practices.

During the celebration, participating in the collective singing of 'Dixie' created a complex space of empathy, mixing pride with discomfort.

This methodology allows for ethical examination of cultural practices, acknowledging personal biases while seeking to understand the perspectives of others.

Themes in Confederate Performative Time



American Divinity

This theme presents the idea that America is God's chosen nation, a concept deeply embedded in American Christian nationalism.



Aspirational Whiteness

This theme idealizes whiteness as a lifestyle and aesthetic aspiration, shaping an idealized version of Southern identity.



Chivalry as Sexuality

Compulsory heterosexuality and preordained, Biblical gender roles. This theme reveals mating rituals based on a mutated concept of 11th century European chivalry.



Religio-Cultural War

Attendees perceive themselves as embattled defenders of traditional values in a secular, antagonistic world.



Racial Injustice Perception Gap

This gap highlights conflicting views on race, with white audiences often seeing themselves as victims while dismissing systemic injustices faced by Black Americans.

Lee invokes God's design for humanity and a religio-cultural war when she says:

This is spiritual warfare. This is not about Confederacy. This is not about a war. This is about wanting to take people who are still spiritual, Christian, Judeo-Christian people and make them sit down and be quiet. And the first thing they could come after was our Confederate heritage. And, folks, guess what? We know how this ends because we've read The Book, and we read it to the end. And we win. So the third reason we should be here is because we know we're going to win in the end, and this is what it's all about.

Transcribed from the *Confederate Memorial Day 2021* proceeding, Beauvoir House and Jefferson Davis Presidential Library, Biloxi, MI, 26 April 2021.



Analysis of Susan Lee's Keynote Address

Spiritual Warfare and Righteousness

- Susan Lee framed the Confederate cause as a 'spiritual war' to uphold Christian and Confederate legacies.
- She described Confederate Americans as engaged in a 'spiritual war' ordained by God.
- Lee emphasized that they 'did not fight for a cause they thought was right. They fought for a cause that was absolutely right!'
- This rhetoric aligns with American Christian nationalist values, portraying the struggle as morally justified.

Historical Context and Mobilization

- Lee's address connects the righteousness of the Confederate cause to critical historical moments: 1776, 1861, and 2021.
- Her speech aims to memorialize Confederate ancestors while mobilizing the audience against perceived secular threats.
- The invocation of a continuous historical struggle reinforces the audience's identity as part of a greater mission.
- This exemplifies how performative time is utilized to sustain Confederate ideology and rally support.

**Permanence
of Racism and
Confederate
Ideology as
described by
Derrick Bell**



Confederate Memorial Day at Beauvoir



Celebration as a Performative Monument

The Confederate Memorial Day celebration at Beauvoir acts as a performative monument, where attendees co-create a Confederate heritage. Symbolic acts like wreath-laying exemplify the intergenerational transmission of Confederate values, reinforcing a Confederate gaze.



Symbolic Acts and Ideological Persistence

Performances, both symbolic and physical, encourage attendees to embody Confederate ideologies, ensuring their persistence in future generations. The act of memorialization at Beauvoir transcends mere ritual; it becomes a mechanism for preserving Confederate ideology in living form.

Conclusion: Influence on Future

01

Confederate performative time sustains white power, embedding its ideologies within American identity.

02

Commemorative practices reinforce Confederate ideologies, intertwining them with American Christian nationalism.

03

The narratives we memorialize shape contemporary American identity, influencing future societal values and beliefs.

04

Understanding these narratives is crucial for navigating towards a more equitable and inclusive future, challenging the legacies of white supremacy.

