

whites of all classes together, papering over class divisions that had erupted earlier in the campaign and had threatened for a while to disrupt the image of white solidarity advanced by the sponsors. A labor party had taken control of the Richmond city council in the late 1880s, and its coalition of blacks and working-class whites actually refused to vote subsidies for the monument in its suburban location because it would "benefit only a certain class of people."⁶¹ But this alliance across racial lines was short-lived, and when the council changed hands it fell back into line, as did the white organizations representing farmers and laborers. By the time of the monument's dedication, populist and conservative groups, laborers and elites, veterans and women, all came together to pay homage to the hero's statue in a much-trumpeted ceremony of popular harmony. Anderson, in his oration, made the unity seem natural, an inevitable consequence of Lee's great moral character:

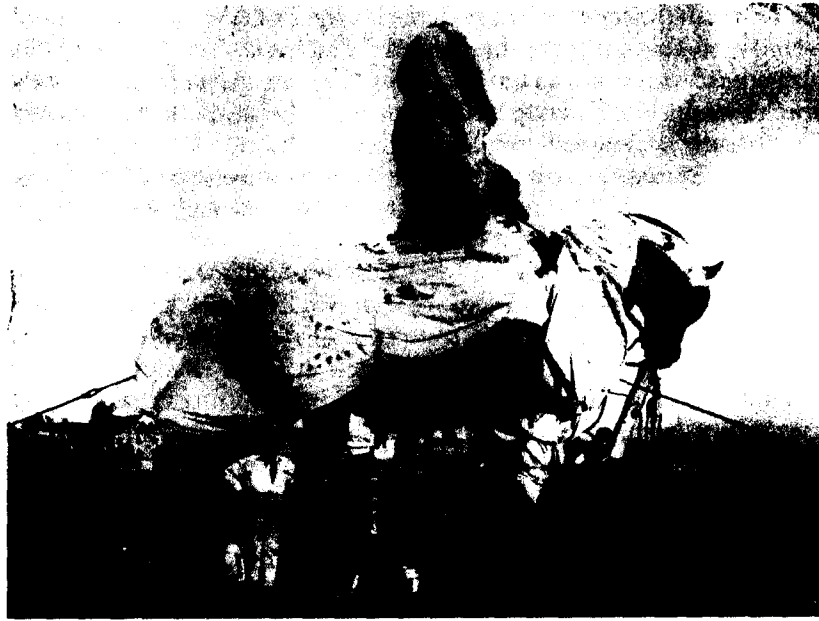
It is, besides and above all, the unique combination in him of moral strength with moral beauty, of all that is great in heroic action with all that is good in common life, that will make of this pile of stone a sacred shrine, dear throughout coming ages, not to soldiers only, but to all "helpers and friends of mankind."⁶²

The only division that refused to be healed—even superficially or symbolically—was the racial division central to the very subject and imagery of the monument. The "cordial unity of the races" imagined by Governor Kemper's board did not materialize, as African Americans for the most part refused to have anything to do with the ceremonies surrounding the completion of the monument. The only African American participants reported in the white newspapers were the faithful body servants of old Confederate veterans, who, speaking in dialect, provided a sentimental spectacle for white readers.⁶³ While orators trumpeted the monument's popularity, John Mitchell, the defiant editor of the *Richmond Planet*, the local black newspaper, hammered away at the monument's pretenses. "The people of the South had to grunt and groan to raise a few thousand dollars for the Lee monument," he wrote just before its dedication.⁶⁴ In an aside calculated to provoke, he claimed that "the men who talk most about the valor of Lee, and the blood of the brave Confederate dead are those who never smelt powder or engaged in a battle. Most of them were at table, either on top or under it, when the war was going on."⁶⁵ After the dedication ceremony, in an extraordinary paragraph, Mitchell reported this reaction: "An old colored man after seeing the mammoth parade of the ex-Confederates on May 29th and gazing at the rebel flags, exclaimed, 'The Southern white folks is on top—the Southern white folks is on top!'"⁶⁶ Here was a stunningly clear statement of the case, which stripped the civilizing clothing off the monument and the ritual

surrounding it, to lay bare its simple message of white domination. The anecdote concludes on a rather different note, however: "After thinking for a moment a smile lit up his countenance as he chuckled with evident satisfaction, 'But we've got the government! We've got the government!'"⁶⁷ The man consoled himself with the reminder that, even though white Southerners had local control of the ritual, "we" were part of a group—the Republican Party—that had control of the national government (Benjamin Harrison had defeated Democratic incumbent Grover Cleveland in the last presidential election). This perspective seemed to deflate the pretensions of the "mammoth parade" and to upset the order ("white folks on top") figured in its ritual.

Yet the paragraph is really a poignant moment of wishful thinking, for the confident assertion "we've got the government" gave no hint of the problematic relationship between African Americans and the national entity that supposedly represented them. Both party and nation had turned their backs on the Reconstruction agenda of civil rights and were coming to embrace the spirit of Confederate commemoration. Much of the Northern press, in fact, responded favorably to the Lee Monument and treated it as a legitimate national monument. The *New York Times* argued that Lee's "memory is . . . a possession of the American people, and the monument that recalls it is itself a national possession."⁶⁸ The *Times* was merely echoing the argument put forth in the opening paragraph of Archer Anderson's oration, which asserted that "all who bear the American name may proudly consent that posterity shall judge them by the structure, which we are here to dedicate."⁶⁹ In their alienation from the monument and all it represented, African Americans were now losing even their entitlement to "the American name."

African Americans had to respond, then, from an ever more marginal position. Mitchell himself used the forum of the *Planet* and his position on the Richmond city council, where he was one of three remaining black council members; this was before the full implementation of Jim Crow, which eliminated all elected black officials. These three were the only council members who refused to vote for a city appropriation of \$7,500 for the monument's dedication ceremonies. Mitchell argued that those who wore the "clinking chains of slavery" should be allowed to "keep silent" and refrain from voting.⁷⁰ Public silence, rather than active protest, was in reality their only feasible, nonsuicidal option. This was the dilemma the monument posed: to maintain the integrity of their counter-memory, a memory centered around the historical experience of slavery, blacks had to witness their own silence or disappearance within the larger collective, the "people." Yet they they were not entirely invisible, as Mitchell constantly reminded his readers. He commented with fine irony on a disjunction characteristic of Southern society: though blacks were



5.7 Photograph after hoisting of the Lee statue, May 29, 1890.

absent from the ritual labor of erecting the monument—the cornerstone laying and the ceremonial hauling of the statue and finally the unveiling—they were heavily engaged in the actual physical work that made the rituals possible.

The Negro was in the Northern processions on Decoration Day [Memorial Day] and in the Southern ones, if only to carry buckets of ice-water. He put up the Lee Monument, and should the time come, will be there to take it down. He's black and sometimes greasy, but who could do with out the Negro.⁷¹

Mitchell's point is documented in a remarkable photograph of the monument taken just after the statue was hoisted up top to the pedestal (fig. 5.7). Still draped in white to prepare for the ceremonial unveiling, the statue looks a ghostly counterimage of itself. Four black laborers appear in the lower register of the photograph, standing presumably on a scaffold just below the plinth. Three white men and a barefoot boy—innocent representatives of the common people who share the statue as their “possession”—take privileged places at camera level on the plinth itself and touch the legs of the bronze horse with proprietary nonchalance. The four black men seem to float beneath, their heads caught poking out in the odd intervals between bronze, pants, and wires. In a classic “return of

the repressed," they materialize here as a kind of subtext to the monument's text. They are the memory of the "clinking chains" of slavery. The Confederacy was founded on their backs. They are the labor that built the South's wealth and that dug its defenses when the wealth was threatened. They are the bottom rail without which a top rail cannot exist. They are the hero's anti-image, without which the hero himself could not exist. They are, as Mitchell pointed out, indispensable—the unspoken reference of every claim the monument makes.

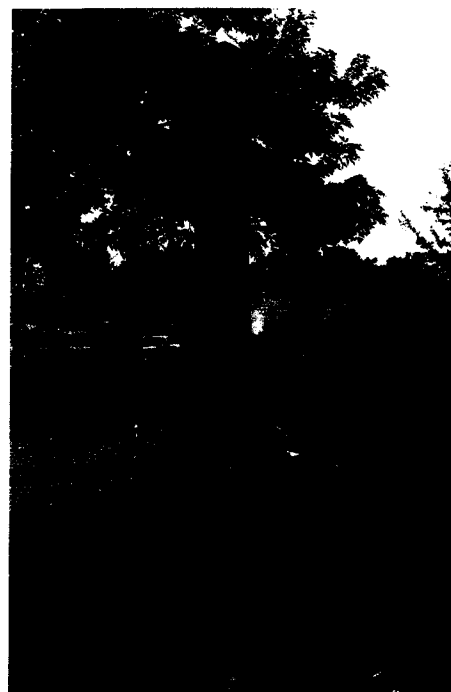
For the most part, of course, white observers did not read the imagery this way. They did not choose to see how white and black worlds might interlock and clash within the concrete reality of the monument. One notable exception, worth exploring in some detail, is Henry James, who saw the monument while on an American tour shortly after the turn of the century. In the essay on Richmond which he published in the *American Scene*, James claimed, astonishingly, that the whole town reeked of slavery despite itself. It was not by any obvious or intentional references, James argued, but by the very lack of genuine historical references to the past. He had come to Richmond expecting to find "vivid images," the "haunted scene" of the war's great tragedy. What he found instead was a place "that looked to me simply blank and void . . . a poor Northern city." His disappointment was intense until he realized that this very blankness was in itself significant: it was the consequence of the old fallacy of slavery. In "the large, sad poorness" of Richmond, James found himself "tasting, mystically, of the very essence of the old Southern idea—the hugest fallacy, as it hovered there to one's backward, one's ranging vision, for which hundreds of thousands of men had ever lain down their lives."⁷² The intellectual and cultural absurdity of trying to maintain slavery in the modern world had so blighted the South that it was left with no visible cultural past, a void where its heart should have been. James ended his essay with the Lee Monument, which, stranded in its absurdly empty modern surroundings, seemed emblematic of the South's condition. Leaving the monument, and leaving Richmond, James imagined the statue "communing, at its altitude, which represents thus some prodigious exemplary perched position, some everlasting high stool of penitence, with the very heaven of futility."⁷³

In one crucial respect, though, for James there was a concrete material legacy of the old institution of slavery, and this was "the intimate presence of the negro." The "negro's" unavoidable proximity was the essential burden of the South, he argued. "One saw them [meaning white Southerners] not much less imprisoned in it and overdarkened by it today than they had been in the time of their so fallacious presumption." Throughout his discussion the African American appears not as a legitimate element of the Southern scene—the implied South is always white—

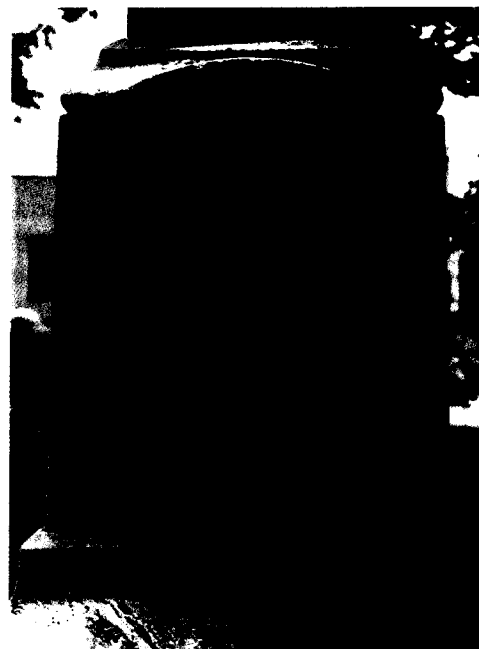
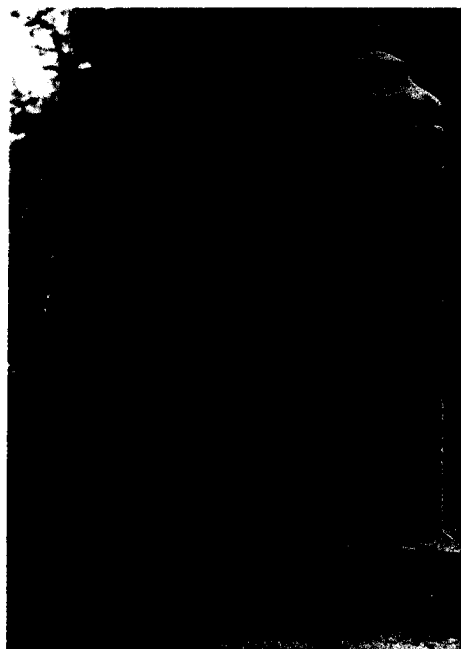
but as a kind of virus preying upon it. James himself felt profoundly "discomposed," even "threatened," by the sight of "tattermalion darkies" who "lounged and sunned themselves within range" at the Washington train station, or by the black teamsters in Richmond "who now emphasized for me with every degree of violence the already-apprehended note of the negro really at home." Here was "the Southern black as we knew him not, and had not within the memory of man known him, at the North"—that is to say, still dark, still "African," posing the "formidable question, which rose suddenly like some beast that had sprung from the jungle."⁷⁴ Doubtless the laborers in the hoisting photograph would pose the same question for James, the question posed by the inescapability of the "Southern black." Yet there is an insight to be drawn from James's paranoid ruminations on the black other. If the Lee Monument was a brilliant effort to re-present white mastery in the postwar world, then James's reading of the Richmond scene suggests that it rested on a precarious foundation. The black men in the picture duly mark and confirm the hierarchical order of the white supremacist society, but by their very presence they threaten to destabilize that order. James's sympathies are entirely with the white half of the equation, which he feels he understands; their past and their present, he thinks, are both linked tragically to a strange and unknowable race. That such an ardent antislavery Northerner would feel this way suggests why the Lee Monument in particular and the Lost Cause in general could so easily enter the mainstream of national memory.⁷⁵

In James's text, the social relation of white and black is tragically vexed, forever linked to the originating tragedy of slavery. This was a quintessential (though not universal) Northern view, and there was a white Southern answer to it. That answer revolved around the mythology of the "faithful slave." Under slavery, some white Southerners maintained, "the intimate presence of the negro" was not a problem but actually a source of social comfort and joy. Whites and blacks had once known, respected, and loved one another, they argued, in a way Northerners could not understand. Emancipation had all but destroyed this intimacy, they lamented, but it survived at least in memory.

Six years after the dedication of the Lee Monument, in the rural South Carolina town of Fort Mill, these sentiments found explicit expression in a modest monument erected on the town green, near the Confederate soldier monument (fig. 5.8). Financed by Captain Samuel White, Confederate veteran and owner of the local cotton mills, it was inscribed and "dedicated to the faithful slaves who, loyal to a sacred trust, toiled for the support of the army, with matchless devotion; and with sterling fidelity guarded our defenseless homes, women and children, during the struggle



5.8-10 Monument to faithful slaves, 1896, Fort Mill, South Carolina.
Below: relief panels.



for the principles of our 'Confederate States of America.'" The monument is a small marble obelisk with two relief panels, now heavily eroded, the work of an anonymous carver—probably an artisan employed by a cemetery-monument supplier. One panel depicts a mammy with a child in her arms seated on the steps of the master's house (fig. 5.9), and the other a field laborer sitting on a log, a sickle leaning against his shoulder (fig. 5.10). As the local newspapers described them, the panels showed "an old colored woman nursing a pretty little white child" and "an old colored man . . . taking an honest rest."⁷⁶ This little monument, modest as it was, shared something in common with Henry Kirke Brown's massive antebellum project for the South Carolina State House: both meant to bring the labor of slaves out of visual purgatory and into the purview of public sculpture. The Fort Mill monument was the first and only representation of the "faithful slave" in a postbellum monument. It was a monument generated from a former slaveholder's perspective, designed not to celebrate slavery's demise but to muse nostalgically over its passing.

Before this little monument appeared, all the energies of Confederate commemoration had gone in an entirely different direction, propelled by the urgent need after the war to dissociate the Southern cause from slavery. The Lee Monument was a high point in this campaign to restructure the historical memory of Southern society. With striking success the monument helped refashion an image of white rule freed from the brutal footing of slavery, even as that image depended upon and perpetuated the structure of racial domination instituted under slavery. Once this purified image had been consolidated and accepted even by important elements of Northern public opinion, there was some room for white Southerners to return to the problem of slavery and its role in their consciousness. They had defended and maintained the institution for most of their history, after all; it could not be simply expurgated from memory. The sentiments that inspired the Fort Mill monument remained common enough, kept alive in family lore and even sometimes in cemetery monuments erected by families to their domestic servants.⁷⁷ The same sentiments were increasingly entering into Southern literature about the old plantation South, exemplified in Thomas Nelson Page's dialect stories of "Marse Chan" appearing in the early 1880s in the national magazine *Century*.⁷⁸ The question was how these sentiments could enter the field of commemoration, so obsessed as it was with constructing an image of white valor purged of the moral incubus of slavery.

With the passage of time, some white Southerners came to see slavery as peculiarly suited to commemoration, a kind of golden age of race relations, built on intimate bonds between blacks and whites: the bond of mammy and child, of young master and his black playmates, of soldier and body servant. The memory of these familial relationships, and of the

system that fostered them, they argued, had to be preserved in public form before the last of the old slaves and masters took their personal stories to the grave. As the century came to a close, recreations of slave life began to be staged in public performances, for example at the Atlanta Cotton States exposition of 1895. At the same time a few plaques and shafts began to appear in public places to commemorate slaves. On at least one Confederate soldier monument, that in Columbia, North Carolina (1912), one of the inscriptions included a statement "in appreciation of our faithful slaves." In the early twentieth century several attempts were made to augment these localized efforts with a regional or even national monument to the "faithful old slaves." The United Daughters of the Confederacy took up the question in 1904 and promoted the idea in the *Confederate Veteran*, and in the 1910s renewed efforts to erect monuments to loyal slaves in every Southern state. In the 1920s some Southern white women worked to erect a monument in honor of the "black mammy" in Washington.⁷⁹ But the more ambitious schemes never materialized. The only Southern monument comparable in any way to the Fort Mill experiment is the notorious full-length statue of an aged, bent black man doffing his hat, erected in 1927 in Natchitoches, Louisiana, and inscribed "in grateful recognition of the arduous and faithful service of the good darkies of Louisiana." Like the aged hero of Stephen Foster's song *My Old Kentucky Home* ("The head must bow, and the back will have to bend, wherever the darkey may go"), this figure is best understood as a former slave—one who has survived emancipation but who retains the appropriate posture and attitude of servility, of "faithfulness."⁸⁰

The Fort Mill monument remains unique as a representation of slavery, one that is deliberately comprehensive, including both house slavery and field slavery, female and male labor. Naturally that labor is sentimentalized. It is relegated to the domain of the elderly, and in both images work is either suspended or disguised. The field hand rests, the bundles of wheat in the background testifying to his labor without him having to engage in it. The woman's work is negated more radically: it is transformed into maternal love, as she returns the child's embrace and their two heads touch. The mammy scene received special attention in the local accounts of the monument, precisely because it represented the relationship of master to slave not as one of domination but of mutual affection. "Love itself" could be read in the features of her face, according to one account (written before those features were lost to erosion).⁸¹ Captain White himself had loved his "old negro mammy," the papers explained, "who crooned him to sleep when a babe," and his monument was meant "to teach generations yet unborn that though black in skin, and servile in station, there existed between the negro and the master a bond of love broken only by death."⁸² An obituary for White published in 1911 said

that "often the slave women would love the children of their owners more than they did their own offspring"—a remarkable claim showing the depths of self-delusion and outright dishonesty involved in the mythology of the mammy—and "this affection, which Northern philanthropy sought to destroy, Capt. White determined to commemorate, and hence erected the slave monument to silently, but constantly proclaim its truth."⁸³ The relationship of slave women to the young masters they cared for and helped rear was undoubtedly fraught with tragic psychological complexity for both parties. The monument condenses that relationship—and the whole structure of forced labor involved in it—to the simple love of a mother for her child.

The slave monument was one of four monuments sponsored by White and located on the Fort Mill town green. The first was a standard Confederate soldier monument, erected in 1891, with its generic image of a white infantryman. The three others were far more unusual and gave this little monumental precinct a unique status in the Southern landscape. They were monuments to Confederate women, to faithful slaves, and to local Catawba Indians who fought for the Confederacy. One might be tempted to label this commemorative program an essay in "diversity," shattering the usual commemorative exclusions of race and gender, but of course it was a representation of diversity within the paternalistic framework of a powerful white man. Captain White was the wealthiest man, the biggest property owner, and the major employer in the area. From a family of cotton planters, he built a pair of cotton mills after the war and thereby transformed Fort Mill from a tiny agricultural village into a small manufacturing town of 2,000. He was unquestionably the local boss. Each of the monuments he sponsored recognized those individuals who did credit to their race or gender by doing their social duty as he understood and helped define it. All the monuments inscribed names of actual people he had known. On the slave monument the names chosen "among the many faithful" have an especially personal connection: eight of the ten are named White. They were his own, or his family's, slaves. The other two are Springs and Spratt, both names of leading families in town who became part of the cotton mill business White had founded.⁸⁴

The faithful-slave monument became rather widely known despite its modest size, its artistic anonymity, and its marginal location. The dedication in May 1896 was well publicized and, according to the newspapers, was attended by "thousands," many of them from outside the area. For the main attraction, the oration, White succeeded in booking Polk Miller, a nationally recognized white performer of "plantation negro" music and "negro sketches" in dialect, who had two years earlier appeared on stage with Mark Twain at Madison Square Garden. Miller's stage act professed to give "the general public a true and faithful reproduction of

Plantation Life and Scenes before the War," but unlike the old minstrel performers he did not appear in blackface and instead posed as a "delineator" of the "Folk Lore" and music of the slave South.⁸⁵ Miller had grown up the son of a slaveowner on a southern Virginia plantation and had (like White) fought for the Confederacy. He began his recital career in Southern cities in the early 1890s but rather soon found sympathetic audiences in the North as well. He claimed to be correcting the misconstructions of black dialect and character found in minstrel shows and published stories. His recital was "not a *burlesque*," according to his publicity brochure, but a representation of "the *real* negro." At the same time he made clear that this "real negro" was not "the young negro of today," whom he despised, but the "old issue darcy" of his boyhood. Miller laced his performances with social commentary satirizing emancipation and black efforts at self-improvement, much of this rhetoric taken directly from the old proslavery argument:

As long as there is left in the South an honest, truthful, old-time "howdy, Marster," negro of the good old days gone-by, he'll tell you that the accomplishment of the freedom of the negro, for which Horace Greeley and Wendell Phillips labored so hard and so long, took out of his life those rays of sunshine which made him not only the happiest creature on earth, but the subject of story and song which delight the people of the South who knew him, loved him, and whose like the world will never, never see again. Will the young negro of to-day ever have a book written about him?⁸⁶

In some ways Miller's material was territory that African Americans themselves had already begun to stake out, with the Fisk Jubilee Singers' performances of spirituals and the explorations of folklore in the *Southern Workman* and the fiction of Charles Chesnut.⁸⁷ It is evident that a profound contest was underway over the proper stewardship and significance of this cultural legacy of slavery, and Miller was right in the middle of it. He played to white audiences but occasionally received protests from the black press or from African Americans who happened to see his show, as they did at Chatauqua in 1895; for them, Miller's show was indeed burlesque, presenting only "that grotesque and illiterate side of the negro."⁸⁸ Miller eventually added a black vocal quartet to his act and thereby competed directly with the Fisk Singers, whom he mocked in his ad as white men "parading in a dark skin"; his own singers, the ad declared, were "genuine negroes . . . taken from the Tobacco Factories in Richmond" who "act and sing like the real Southern Darkey in his 'workin' clothes." W.E.B. DuBois no doubt had Miller's group in mind when he wrote, in *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), that the Fisk Singers "have been imitated—sometimes well, by the singers of Hampton and Atlanta, and sometimes ill, by straggling quartettes."⁸⁹

Miller did not have his quartet at the time of the Fort Mill dedication, but he did capitalize on the presence of "genuine negroes"—the many former slaves who were reported to be in attendance. Unlike the Lee Monument ceremonies, this ceremony demanded their participation, their symbolic assent to its claims. Ex-slaves pulled the cord to unveil the shaft, spoke in gratitude to Captain White, and sang an "old plantation song." According to the white newspapers, "the hearts of the plantation negroes were won" by Miller's speech, and "they nodded their assent when he struck a sympathetic chord and told of the love between the slaves and their masters and mistresses."⁹⁰ It would have been interesting to hear the reaction of someone like DuBois to this white-orchestrated performance designed to reveal the authentic emotional life of slavery. Reception of the monument in the black press unfortunately has proved elusive, but the monument was actually noted with approval twenty years later in Freeman Murray's study on emancipation in American sculpture. He wrote that "there is no gainsaying the praiseworthy motives which prompted its erection and the very laudatory character of the tribute inscribed on it."⁹¹ By this time the imagery of blacks in popular culture had become increasingly vicious, with the stereotype of the docile slave being edged out by the figure of the predatory black male rapist and murderer exemplified in D. W. Griffith's film *Birth of a Nation* (1915). In this climate the figure of the faithful slave could be read as a "positive" type, no matter how much it misrepresented the nature of the relationships fostered by slavery. And in this climate, not even Miller's "old issue" black quartet could survive, as the hostility to black performers on "white" stages eventually forced him to disband the group.⁹²

White's monument is one of those rare public monuments that gives voice and form to sentiments that could not be represented in the commemorative mainstream. Indeed the whole work is really about sentiment, not slavery. The monument transforms this extreme institution of domination into the nostalgic fiction of a lost love. Dear as this fiction was to many white Southerners, it had to be banished from their more official program of memory because the institution of slavery, unlike the figure of Lee or even the idea of the Lost Cause, was no longer "American." Even sentimentalized, slavery did not have a legitimate place in the modern nation's self-image. And however much white Southerners might scorn the North and "Northern philanthropy," they still craved legitimacy in the nation the North had conquered and redefined. The final chapter of the book takes up this issue by examining how local publics, from both North and South, sought national legitimacy in the new form of the common-soldier monument.