

SLAVERY'S  
MEMORIAL

THE FREEDMEN'S MEMORIAL became the nation's monument to emancipation even though the design might have better commemorated slavery. If one changed the white hero from Lincoln to say, John C. Calhoun, and took away the chains and the whipping post, the work would have functioned rather well as an illustration of the old proslavery argument: a benevolent master gradually uplifting the primitive African into Christian civilization through the secure shelter of slavery. Both the narrative and the image of Ball's group were still that deeply embedded in the relations of paternalistic domination and racial subordination fundamental to the American slave system.

Yet monuments openly sympathetic to slavery simply did not exist. After the Civil War, slavery fell in the trashheap of history, and even its most ardent advocates before the war were now forsaking it. Within a remarkably short period of time, white Southerners were not only repudiating the institution that had been central to their society but writing it out of their history of the war. The Confederacy was not formed to protect slavery, they claimed, but to protect states' rights; the war was not fought over slavery but over the abstract issue of sovereignty. A massive and deliberate process of collective forgetting took place, which has still not been reversed. Only recently have historians seriously challenged the erasure of slavery from the Confederate consciousness, despite overwhelming evidence that proslavery ideology became even more central to white Southern identity during the war than before. "Leaders of the secession movement across the South cited slavery as the most compelling reason for southern independence," Drew Gilpin Faust has written, and the same reasoning was repeated in press, pulpit, and school alike until virtually the end of the war. "Negro slavery is the South," wrote one Georgia editor in 1862, "and the South is negro slavery."<sup>1</sup>

The business of Confederate commemoration after the war was to smash this equation. This involved a vertiginous shift in consciousness. Articles of faith that had been widely inculcated suddenly had to be disavowed. Personal and institutional memories had to be thoroughly

revised and resorted. In short, the South had to be reconstructed, though not along the lines contemplated by the Northern victors.

In this process of reconstruction slavery disappeared but, in a peculiar way, remained central. It was the invisible or unspeakable core that structured what could be made visible or utterable. A nation formed expressly to protect slaveholding, no longer a nation and no longer slaveholding, sought to redefine itself as an abstract moral cause. If the grand emancipation designs of the 1860s were monuments to a new order that never came to be, the Confederate monuments erected after the war commemorated an old order that never existed in the first place—a slave society without the moral impediment of slavery. Contradictions were inherent in both these Northern and Southern projects of reconstruction. Yet the contradictions fatally undermined the former while the latter held together in surprising equilibrium.

As the radical Northern campaign of commemoration fizzled, white Southerners began to adapt their commemorative project to the changing conditions of postwar society. The centerpiece of their effort was the former capital of the Confederacy, Richmond, Virginia. Richmond was an industrial and financial center that was steeped in the complex historical associations of the Old South. Its heritage encompassed the highest of high culture—Jefferson's neo-Roman Capitol, with Houdon's great statue of Washington inside—as well as the second largest slave market in the antebellum South. At the same time, modern Richmond strived to be a showcase of business enterprise and urban progress. Richmond was the center of the "Lost Cause," as the Confederacy came to be known, but it was by no means backward-looking. The commemoration of the Lost Cause sought to span the old and the new, to integrate history and progress—which is precisely why slavery had no legitimate place in the commemorative order. The key figure in the cult of the Lost Cause was Robert E. Lee, the Confederate commander whose death in 1870 spurred a host of ambitious memorial schemes. The key monument was the huge equestrian statue erected on the suburban outskirts of Richmond in 1890, after a very long and sometimes bitter campaign. The history of that campaign and its outcome offers ample evidence of the white South's erasure of slavery from its official past. But if the same evidence is read a little against the grain, it soon reveals slavery's hidden cultural work as a controlling absence, with a subtle but nevertheless crucial impact on the sculptural configuration of Southern white heroism.

While Lincoln was the indisputable embodiment of the Union and its moral cause, Lee was the embodiment of the Confederacy. He had served as commander of the Army of Northern Virginia, the most successful of the Confederate armies, whose list of battles included most of the celebrated engagements of the war. That a political leader would represent

the Union and a military leader would come to represent the Confederacy deserves some examination. Jefferson Davis, Lincoln's actual counterpart as president of the Confederacy, was put in the unpopular position of prosecuting a national war effort among states that were in theory independent. So, of course, was Lincoln, whose own popularity during his lifetime suffered as a result. Yet Davis did not end the war a martyr, as Lincoln did. He was captured while allegedly trying to escape disguised in women's clothing; the incident became a cause célèbre and a major affront to Southern white "manhood." Lee, on the other hand, was an extraordinarily respected figure, always represented as the South's exemplar of manhood.<sup>2</sup>

However significant, these facts do not get to the root of the matter. The fundamental effect of installing Lee as the South's premier representative was that it depoliticized the Confederacy after the fact. With Lee as the major historical actor, the story of the Lost Cause became a glorious military record rather than a political struggle to secure a slaveholding nation. The white South's urgent need to dissociate the Confederacy from slavery after the war dictated this strategy of depoliticization. Davis was a plantation owner and large-scale slaveholder from the Deep South, whose own interests, like the Confederacy's, were obviously intertwined with the institution of slavery. Lee, on the other hand, was a professional military man from Virginia who owned few slaves before the war, and who claimed after the war to have "always been in favor of emancipation—gradual emancipation."<sup>3</sup> Although Lee's own statements on slavery recorded in several letters from 1856 to 1865 hardly support this retrospective claim, what matters is that he was less vitally attached to the institution than the typical Southern planter and he could more credibly claim afterward that he had not fought to defend it. In the late 1860s he was a living example of the white South's collective reversal on slavery. His historical role as a leader of soldiers—not a maker of policy—complemented and enhanced that personal example. In some ways he fit the classical mold of the reluctant leader, as George Washington had, and like Washington—the fellow Virginian with whom Lee was often compared—he was thought to be above politics. For all these reasons he was the obvious man to personify a newly revised, newly remembered Confederacy—a Confederacy that pretended to have fought a heroic struggle not for slavery but for liberty, defined as the right of states to self-determination.<sup>4</sup>

As he became the white South's answer to Lincoln, Lee compared favorably in one obvious and important way. He was "perfection" in his physical appearance. No artist, one writer claimed, could improve on the "grand original."<sup>5</sup> Where Lincoln was thought to embody "the sculpturally impossible," to use Marianna Griswold van Rensselaer's pithy

phrase,<sup>6</sup> Southern writers described Lee as if his person were already a work of art, embodying the very qualities thought essential to sculpture: repose, beauty, strength.<sup>7</sup> If Lincoln was a sculptural problem, then, Lee was a readymade specimen.

With the equation of canonical whiteness and moral virtue so deeply embedded in the consciousness of race, Lee's outward appearance was easily read as a reflection of inner superiority. This equation reappears frequently in descriptions by men and women alike, as in this gushing account written by a Maryland woman: "The man who stood before us, the embodiment of a Lost Cause, was the realized King Arthur. The soul that looked out of his eyes was as honest and fearless as when it first looked on life. One saw the character, as clear as crystal . . . and the heart, as tender as that of ideal womanhood."<sup>8</sup> These kinds of juxtapositions—King Arthur and ideal womanhood—were commonly invoked to suggest the visible range of virtues synthesized in the single figure of Lee, a range that could bridge even the customary gap between the sexes. While Lee's image thus benefited from the association of qualities normally sorted by gender, this synthesis serves to underscore the image's racial exclusivity. Lee may have been man and woman, but he was not white and black. He functioned much more readily than Lincoln ever could as a racial icon.

Lee offered white Southerners a hero in their own image, an instrument with which they could prod white Northerners to realign their sympathies along proper racial lines. The war had disrupted traditional patterns of cultural difference by allying white with black and pitting white against white. To ardent Unionists Lee was nothing less than a traitor, while the black men who fought against him were heroes. But white Southerners worked hard to reverse these sentiments. Lee was hardly a traitor, they argued, but instead was a courageous Christian gentleman who loved the Union and returned to it wholeheartedly after his defeat. As time passed, white Northerners increasingly accepted the argument. The legitimization of Lee after the war helped to reestablish old lines of racial sympathy. The losers in this process of reconciliation were of course African Americans, who could not possibly accept Lee as their hero. If Lee was no longer traitor, no longer "other," otherness was left to reside in the emancipated slaves and their descendants who did not forget that the Confederacy with Lee at its head had fought to keep them in bondage.

Lee's canonical whiteness was essential to his postwar rehabilitation. It forced white Northerners to confront their own racial loyalties and it gave white Southerners a racial model with which to justify both the Confederacy and their postwar politics of white supremacy. Lincoln was never a comparable racial model: he did not have the right looks or the military bearing. The irony is that sculptors were inspired to turn the

noncanonical Lincoln into a manumitting master, but a master nevertheless, whereas Lee's mastership had to be displaced, or represented by very subtle means. For Lee an imagery of mastery and indeed domination did emerge, but not in the obvious territory of race relations. It emerged rather in the relationship of the hero to his animal servant, the horse Traveller.<sup>9</sup>

The equestrian image, of course, was the standard formula for the representation of military heroes, precisely because it did encode the idea of command in the apparently natural dominance of man over animal. Yet in reality there is something unnatural about that dominance: horses are bigger and stronger than their human riders. They are controlled by a combination of cultural authority—the whole structure of confinement and reward/punishment—and the personal authority of the rider, who communicates and reinforces in subtle (or not so subtle) physical signals the structure of authority behind him. If the relationship is properly tuned, the self-control of the rider becomes indistinguishable from control over the horse. The ideal of decorum thus seems to merge in a natural way with the idea of dominance. This made the equestrian image the historically preferred image for leadership in general, and the equestrian statue the most prestigious form of public sculpture. It was the standard solution for military commanders because the idea of command defined them; the relationship of man to horse could easily be read as the relationship of officer to troops.

All this took on a special—one is tempted to say obsessive—character in the commemoration of Robert E. Lee. For no other American hero of the nineteenth century did the relationship of horse and rider assume such acute significance. It was as if the commemorative fortunes of the hero, the Confederacy, and the white South all rested on correctly defining and representing that subtle, if commonplace, union of man and animal (fig. 5.1). Consider one simple anecdote published in 1886 in the heat of the campaign to finish the equestrian monument to Lee in Richmond, a story about Traveller and an unlucky "negro boy" who tried to mount him. Like much of the lore about Lee and Traveller, it described a perfect sympathy between them. But this particular tale had an interesting twist. It aimed to prove that the horse, who "partook of the repose of his master when General Lee was on him, . . . was by no means the 'amiable' animal some have described." The story undoubtedly came from the Richmond-based sculptor Edward Valentine, who asked to see Traveller ridden so that he could study the action of the horse. This was in 1871, a year after Lee's death. One of Lee's daughters "ordered a negro boy to mount," and though Traveller was fourteen years old and looking very meek he thrust his forefeet in the air and "positively refused to allow the mount." Only after a "young Texan," a college student from Washington and Lee,



5.1 A. Hoen and Co., *Genl. Lee on Traveler*, 1876, lithograph.

brought a new saddle and mounted the animal himself could the demonstration take place. The story is far-fetched in its racism. Would Traveller's owners have never before had a "negro boy" mount him for exercise? The story is constructed to show how Traveller instinctively understood the white supremacist system that elevated Lee to its pinnacle. He refused to allow blacks to ride him and responded only to legitimate white authority, in this case the college-educated Texan. Ultimately only Lee could entirely tame the horse's high spirits and make him seem calm, because Lee had so mastered the practice of "absolute control."<sup>10</sup>

The anecdote was published in the main Richmond newspaper as part of its campaign to promote Valentine's model for an equestrian monument. What the public wanted in an equestrian statue of Lee, according to the paper, was not necessarily an exact likeness of Traveller (who was smaller and scrawnier than the typical Virginia thoroughbred) but an image that captured the underlying significance of Lee's relationship to the horse. This the paper summarized as "power in repose."<sup>11</sup> Lee's power over the stronger, wilder animal was so complete that it did not need to be exercised. Lee did not have to spur or whip or strangle with the reins; his moral authority achieved what mere physical domination could accomplish only imperfectly. As Jabez Curry observed, Lee's attitude on

his horse was "not that of an Equestrian, making a display of his skill or strength, but that of a well-trained officer, perfectly at ease and consciously master of an inferior animal."<sup>12</sup>

The equestrian relationship was thus an overripe metaphor, referring ultimately to the nature of power in society. The image of Lee on his horse worked beautifully as a model of leadership for a white supremacist society trying to legitimate its own authority. Reconstruction had ended sooner and less violently in Virginia than in states further south, in part because the white leadership realized that it could extend some political privileges to the black population without undermining the fundamental premise of white rule.<sup>13</sup> In this pre-Jim Crow era, before the outright exclusion of African Americans from the civic realm, the white supremacist system relied on symbolic expressions of a racial harmony achieved under the firm but patient hand of a white-dominated government. White authority was (mis)represented as moral rather than physical force, a natural relation of superior to inferior race. Hence, in the Traveller story, the Negro boy's inability to subdue the stronger animal signifies a failure of moral force, of natural leadership, whereas Lee has so much of it that the horse calms under him without any sign of physical coercion whatsoever. The equestrian Lee is at once a retrospective image of the benevolent master, good to his inferiors, and a prospective image of a postwar white government claiming to know what is best for its own black population. The great power of this equestrian image was that it could bridge the old regime of slavery and the new regime of white rule without explicitly representing either; it helped legitimate the continuity between the two even as it disguised the physical and institutional forces that propped up both of them.

Since the equestrian image of Lee stood for nothing less than the moral authority of the Confederacy and of white power in general, the campaign to erect an equestrian monument was an extraordinarily high-stakes affair. Getting the image just right proved exceptionally difficult and divisive. Three different groups representing major divisions within the white Virginia elite strove to control the monument campaign and mold it in their own image. One was a group of veteran officers from Lee's Army of Northern Virginia, headed by the notorious "irreconcilable" Jubal Early who wanted to perpetuate the policy and imagery of Southern defiance. Another was a "ladies' committee" of women from pedigreed Virginia families who wanted a monument of artistic distinction. The third group was an official body headed by the governor of Virginia, which saw in the monument campaign an opportunity for political accommodation between North and South. All three groups shared the presuppositions of white supremacy and shared the same basic image of Lee as "power in repose." Yet a long process of conflict and

compromise was necessary to mold their competing visions into a single monument.<sup>14</sup>

One key set of differences involved the ritual of the monument campaign, namely who would be asked to contribute and how they would be approached. The ritual of fund raising was crucial because on it turned the whole question of what public the monument stood for, whose collective memory was represented there. Though all three groups were centered in Virginia they envisioned a public subscription that would be national, or at least regional, in scope. But Jubal Early's group sought contributions only from the veterans who had actually fought under Lee's command; the monument was to be a kind of votive offering from the troops to their departed leader. The group issued an appeal in 1871 "To the Survivors of the Army of Northern Virginia" for their "spontaneous offerings." However the language of the appeal did not assume spontaneous support and ended by leaning heavily on images of military obedience: contributing was both a soldier's duty and a test of his devotion to his dead commander. Moreover, agents who would press the appeal personally were to "collect" (i.e., solicit) the contributions, on commission.<sup>15</sup> Early had grave misgivings about employing salaried agents because for him the enterprise was not a business proposition; it was supposed to be a ritual of voluntary participation. Early eventually fired all his agents, but all the various organizations involved in fund raising for the Lee Monument at one time or another had recourse to paid agents. The ladies' committee employed them early on with notable success, and later the governor's association sent agents throughout the South as far away as Texas.<sup>16</sup> The governor's secretary explained that only direct, personal solicitation would get results and that the preferred agent was "a crippled, maimed Confederate," smooth of speech and "apt to interest the women."<sup>17</sup> In other words, the techniques of persuasion, pity, and even romance were not only admissible but seen as necessary.

These techniques were made necessary by the widespread refusal to accept the basic premise of the public subscription—that donations measured allegiance to the hero's memory. The agents wanted to make the question of contributing a ritual test of each person's devotion to the hero: if you believed in Lee, ran their logic, you would contribute to this monument. But in case after case individuals pleaded extenuating circumstances: crop failure, yellow fever, poverty. Or, more defiantly, many people made clear that, despite their admiration of Lee, they had other priorities for their money, notably other monuments proposed at the local or state level. Texans, for example, told the governor's agent that they would not contribute toward a monument in Virginia until they had done their commemorative duty for Sam Houston or the heroes of the Alamo.<sup>18</sup>

Given the enormous difficulties involved in soliciting contributions for a monument, even one to a man as admired as Lee, the self-imposed limitations of the veterans' group were bound to be fatal. In 1875, when a Confederate veteran was elected governor of Virginia, Early gave up and handed his meager funds over to the monument association then being organized by the new governor, James Kemper, and his specially appointed secretary, Samuel Bassett French. Kemper's association widened the scope of the fund-raising campaign not only to get more money but to construct a powerful image of popular unity. This was to be a people's monument to their greatest hero, not a demonstration of soldiers' loyalty to authority. For this reason certain kinds of contributions assumed an importance far beyond their cash value. The association brought its campaign to the public schools, for example, and many responded enthusiastically though with little means—like the Custis School whose subscriptions totaled forty-seven cents, mostly from children donating a penny each. The image of schoolchildren contributing their precious pennies buoyed the standing of the enterprise and seemed to confirm that the memory of Lee still had a force in popular culture, if only the monument could tap it.<sup>19</sup>

One kind of contribution particularly gratified Governor Kemper's board because it seemed to belie the racial exclusivity inherent in the whole project: a contribution from African Americans. The one documented example, probably unique, occurred in the town of Terry, Mississippi, where the white and black populations both donated to the campaign. This extraordinary event came to the attention of Kemper and the board, who saw in it justification for their view that "the interests of the white and coloured races of the South are so intermixed, that to promote them, there must be a cordial unity of purpose."<sup>20</sup> The black man responsible for organizing his community in the effort, William Bingham, received a special letter of commendation from Secretary French, which concluded:

Under Providence the white and black man of the South have had their lots cast in the same place, and true wisdom determines that they should be friends not enemies: and every evidence of the breaking down of the partition wall between them, raised by bad men, for personal ends, will be hailed by all good men as an omen of better days in the future, to be encouraged in every suitable way.<sup>21</sup>

The apparent sincerity of the letter makes it all the more ironic. The board in reality made no effort to solicit contributions from African American communities and was careful not to make appeals in towns under "Radical" (i.e., Republican or black) rule. Everyone understood why a

monument to Lee would not represent the "interests" of the "coloured race," why it was not an instrument of racial harmony. A few years earlier, for example, a much-publicized dispute had erupted when white legislators in Virginia proposed to purchase an official portrait of Lee for the State Capitol. Black legislators opposed the idea because "General Lee had fought to keep [them] in slavery," and the *Richmond Dispatch* reported that "nobody was surprised" at their response.<sup>22</sup> It was obvious that the commemoration of Lee provoked racial discord. Yet according to French this was the fault of the "bad men" (meaning the Radicals), who were dividing the races; "good men" like William Bingham realized that their best interests lay with the white race and not against it.

In the 1870s Kemper's administration represented the moderate wing of the ruling white party, keen to foster a symbolic front of racial harmony. Unlike such "irreconcilables" as Jubal Early who did not want any blacks participating in civic life and ritual, except as servants, the moderates could accept a greater social and political role for blacks as long as blacks accepted the general terms of white supremacy.<sup>23</sup> Thus Bingham's activity was particularly welcome: it represented that "cordial unity" of the races that came with the acceptance of white domination. Blacks had a place in the commemorative ritual. They could enter into this construction of "collective" memory, created by and for whites, and in so doing become visible within the collective, though visibility came at an enormous price—that of relinquishing the claim to a countermemory more in line with their own hopes for liberation. This tension between visibility and self-definition would become even sharper in the more conspicuous ritual events organized later in the campaign.

For the governor the Lee monument project was part of a larger political campaign to legitimate Southern white supremacy in the national consciousness. The commemorative project paralleled Kemper's public policy, which was a series of delicate negotiations with Northern racial policy calculated at once to defend white rule at home and encourage Northern aid and cooperation. Kemper was a pragmatist, steering a middle course in between the "irreconcilables," who scorned Northern whites and their Southern black allies, and the "scalawags," who appealed to the black vote.<sup>24</sup> He deliberately took the monument campaign out of the hands of the irreconcilables and delegated it instead to the politically moderate French, a crony of the notorious political boss William Mahone, Confederate general turned railroad entrepreneur whose politics of accommodation made him a traitor to traditionalists like Early.<sup>25</sup> By giving the monument campaign to a Mahone ally, Kemper was not only dispensing patronage to a powerful supporter who had helped him get elected but forging the kind of coalition he felt the future

demanded. Kemper and French conducted the monument campaign in this spirit of coalition building. They were happy to take contributions from anyone, and were especially gratified when money came from Union supporters. On these few occasions French would stress that Lee was not merely a Confederate but "a great American soldier" and that the board looked forward to the day when the sections were reconciled and "peace and brotherly love shall everywhere prevail."<sup>26</sup> Lee was offered as a hero for all, not just for those of unimpeachable loyalty to the Confederate cause but for Northern whites and even for Southern blacks willing to embrace him. The commemoration of Lee thus provided a symbolic field in which to build a new image of popular unity and reconciliation under traditional white rule.

The handful of women who comprised the ladies' committee probably approved of these goals, though their views are harder to read. Unlike their male counterparts, they were not public figures and preferred to keep out of the public eye. Yet they too conceived of their project as a broad-based monument, "designed to go down to posterity as an exponent of the nation's devotion and admiration for our immortal Lee."<sup>27</sup> Their differences with the governor's association revolved not around the ritual of the campaign but around the question of how the monument would take concrete form. The women wanted above all a work of art, and they were fully prepared to go outside the South and even outside the country to get it. For the governor's board, however, art had little if any importance. The board approached the design process in the same spirit it approached the fund-raising process, as an opportunity for coalition building. When the board decided to hold a design competition in 1877, French assembled a jury of several dozen Southerners who constituted a cross section of white leadership in local and national politics, religion, and society; the idea was to create a powerful coalition that would support the design, give it broad respectability, and get it built. Though French gave the jury specific instructions in how to evaluate the designs, the process of evaluation appeared to be an elaborate charade intended primarily to identify the candidate with the most political support.<sup>28</sup>

The women's committee repudiated this process and the whole political arena in which it took place. The committee gave voice to conventionally feminine concerns in a century that made women the primary guardians of "culture," understood as the domain of gentility, social refinement, and aesthetic grace. As women from some of the most elite families in Virginia, they were perfectly positioned to play their cultural role. "'Art is long' though 'time is fleeting,'" argued Sarah Nicholas Randolph, head of the committee, and "the work whose execution we are directing will stand long after our generation is lost in oblivion."<sup>29</sup> In this

long view of the case, the immediate political tasks of coalition building carried little weight. The women seemed to feel confident that Lee would thrive in Southern memory; what mattered to them was that his image ascend into the realm of culture, that it be wrapped in and refined by the medium of art. They wanted a monument that would ultimately transcend the South, its local politics and tastes. Art was the vehicle. It was art that would secure Lee's position in the national pantheon of great men; art that would enable him to take his rightful place in the universal narrative of human progress, which it was the mission of culture to relate.<sup>30</sup>

The issue of art was so pivotal for the women's committee that it led to a painful public breach between the women and the governor's association. They refused to accept the results of the governor's 1877 design competition, held on to the money they had promised to the official association, and several years later sponsored a design competition of their own organized along radically different lines. Comparing these two design competitions is a fascinating exercise, for it demonstrates vividly the stakes of representation. Even people who shared the same basic image of Lee could approach the problem of his representation in fundamentally different ways.

The two design competitions were based on opposing methods of viewing and evaluating sculpture. To begin with, the two juries had divergent expectations of what the sculptor's model was supposed to show. The competition sponsored by the women's committee was juried by professional artists who were accustomed to judging competition models as sketches, exercises in composition rather than finished detail. But the governor's jury of 1877 viewed the models not as sketches but as miniature versions of the final design. They showed little interest in the aesthetic values that the sketch was meant to demonstrate—the harmony of lines and forms, the beauty or originality of the controlling idea. This is because the heart of the design problem, as they saw it, was the hero's likeness. "A *man on a horse* will not suffice," French told a potential competitor, "General Lee's effigy alone will satisfy the public."<sup>31</sup> The board told its judges to attend to "portraiture, skill in workmanship, and true conceptions of the hero and the cause he represented."<sup>32</sup> This group of requirements deliberately spoke to the demands of "truth" rather than "art"; and in fact the two categories were often framed as opposing, even irreconcilable, terms. For most of the judges the evaluation of truth boiled down to assessing likeness and pose. The "conception of the cause" had become so grounded in ideas about Lee's physical appearance and demeanor that the representational problem was drastically simplified in this way.<sup>33</sup>

This did not mean that creating a faithful likeness and an apt pose was a simple job. So much rested on the notion of Lee as a specimen of physi-

cal and moral perfection that he became an almost impossible standard of representation. He embodied a synthesis of virtues—strength and repose, forcefulness and modesty, manliness and grace—which, it is true, seemed to make him an eminently fit subject for sculpture, inasmuch as standard academic doctrine stressed a similar equipoise of discipline and energy and a similar faith in the equation of physical and moral beauty. But negotiating such a synthesis in practice—particularly in a portrait statue rather than an ideal subject—was a highly problematic task. To complicate it, many of the judges had extremely precise visual memories of Lee and his horsemanship, which gave them extraordinary critical confidence and rigor, even as they apologized for not being judges of “art.” The judges tended to measure the horse and rider, point by point, against a fixed, a priori image of Lee on horseback. Even judges who had not known Lee personally used the same procedure, probably based on their familiarity with prints like *Lee on Traveller* (fig. 5.1) (which the governor’s association had published as a fund-raising device). One such judge explained that he had to “create for myself a standard of what an equestrian statue of General Lee ought to be, and then determine which of the models inspected by me approached nearest to that conception.”<sup>34</sup> In this mode of objective comparison, judges studied Lee’s mount in the saddle, the position of his bridle arm, the rigidity of his legs, and diverse points of human and equine anatomy with an eye to detail that very few of the models withstood. One can appreciate the acuteness of this criticism by testing it against the only plaster model still in existence, the entry of Edward Valentine (fig. 5.2). His model received mixed reviews but several negative observations cropped up repeatedly—for example, the defectiveness of the horse’s neck. One judge noted that “from the throat latch to his breast is almost a perpendicular,” which, he argued, suggests a horse in motion, except that this one is supposed to be at rest, four feet on the ground. “The horse,” he concluded, “presents very much the appearance of a Christmas toy,” an image another judge echoed when he wrote disparagingly that the model was “very pretty as an ornament.”<sup>35</sup>

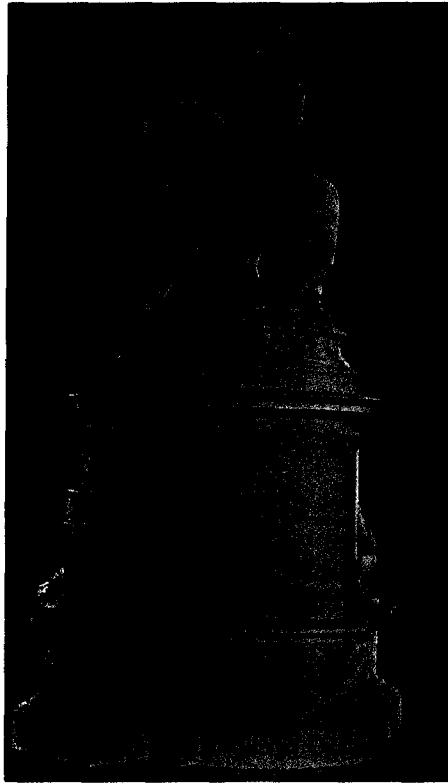
Throughout this criticism there is a notable absence of the kind of narrative reading one might expect from “untrained” critics. If judges did visualize a narrative, it was almost always to show how the sculptor had gone wrong. Thus descriptions like “an old granger going to church on his waggon horse” or “a farmer drowsily wending his way across his broad acres” used narrative terms to satirize particular compositions.<sup>36</sup> Almost all the judges favored a still pose, as if Lee and his horse were in front of a camera (which they were in the print of *Lee on Traveller*, made from a photograph). A pose that suggested a more elaborate narrative quickly took the sculptor into dangerous territory. The entry of Moses Ezekiel (fig. 5.3), an expatriate Virginian working in Rome, seemed to be



5.2 Edward Valentine, model for Lee monument, circa 1877, plaster.

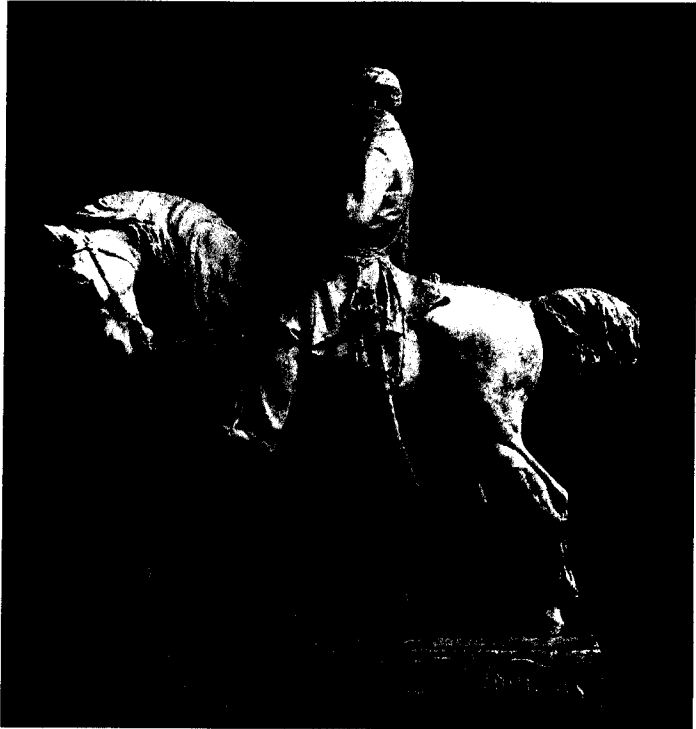
the worst transgressor in this respect; one judge could only make sense of the horse's pose if its rider were in the act of lassoing a wild animal. To represent Lee's mastery as an overt display of restraining force, along the lines of this model, was a fatal error.<sup>37</sup> Any narrative but the most minimal seemed to contaminate the canonical relationship between the horse and the rider. In particular, the narrative of domination had to be suppressed, hidden within a more static image of latent power.

It is harder to specify exactly how the judges operated in the women's competition because the documents (if there were any) do not survive. But we can draw some good inferences based on the composition of the jury. The women deliberately chose a small jury of one architect and two sculptors, all Northerners and all respected "professional" monument makers. The architect was federal official Edward Clark, and the sculptors were two famous men we have already encountered for their important role in Union commemoration: John Quincy Adams Ward and Augustus Saint-Gaudens. These three men no doubt ignored the details examined so



5.3 Moses Ezekiel, model for Lee monument, circa 1877, plaster (now lost).

closely in the earlier competition and looked at the models instead as mere sketches, intended, as Saint-Gaudens later said, “to indicate only the general treatment of the proposed work.”<sup>38</sup> This way of looking was above all academic, geared toward evaluating how the theme was rendered in the main lines and formal relationships of the composition. One gets a sense of what the judges were looking for by studying Charles Niehaus’s prizewinning model, which survives in a studio photograph dated August 11, 1885 (fig. 5.4). Unlike *Lee on Traveller*, posed still before a camera, horse and rider here are in movement. The design features a strong leading diagonal connecting the angle of the horse’s lowered head with the right front leg planted beneath. Contrasting with this powerful leaning pull of the horse is the fixed upright position of the rider, as stable as a carousel pole. In narrative terms, Lee maintains perfect balance as he restrains the animal’s bursting internal energy. In compositional terms, Lee’s vertical body anchors the group in place while the horse’s forward-pointing diagonal breaks the design’s symmetry and



5.4 Charles Niehaus, model for Lee monument, circa 1886, plaster (now lost).

puts the whole in motion. Niehaus, it seems, negotiated a proper balance between compositional values of dynamism and stability, and between representational values of force and sobriety. The judges overlooked a detail of Niehaus's model that drew intense criticism from Virginians monitoring the competition results: the bobtail on Lee's horse. This was a representational gaffe that would have disqualified Niehaus from serious consideration in the men's competition. The bobtail simply did not belong on a Virginia gentleman's horse. It carried suggestions of effeminacy, as the *Richmond Whig* implied when it said that Lee might as well have had "his hair banged."<sup>39</sup> Jubal Early went so far as to write the governor and tell him that if the design were ever erected he would "feel like collecting the survivors of the 2nd Corps, and going to Richmond to blow up the thing with dynamite."<sup>40</sup>

There were bitter differences, then, between the two approaches to sculpture represented in these design competitions. They had become po-

larized around what were seen as two conflicting values: artistry and objectivity. For the most part the Virginia press came down on the side of objectivity, and kept arguing that all the public really wanted was "Lee as he actually was," not a figure smothered by the "tricks" and "adulteries" of art.<sup>41</sup> The *Norfolk Landmark* argued that the sponsors of the monument should listen to the veterans, and that the veterans "call with one voice for the subordination of Art to Nature."<sup>42</sup> This was a familiar sort of dispute, repeated many times in the history of nineteenth-century American public sculpture. Without a set of academic institutions to establish standards of production and channel patronage, as in France, American sculptural practice in the mid-nineteenth century still had two extreme flanks—one intent on professionalizing sculpture by mastering the Western European tradition, and the other intent on marketing an image of "natural" American genius in tune with popular taste. Harriet Hosmer and Clark Mills, as we have seen, were representative of these opposing flanks in the 1860s, but the rhetorical dispute between "art" on the one side and "nature" and "the people" on the other would continue for decades to mark discussions of public art, especially military monuments.

The governor and his board aligned themselves with the popular flank and effectively rigged their competition against European artists.<sup>43</sup> Not surprisingly, the jury ended up supporting a popular sculptor in the self-taught mold. The surprise was that their choice was neither a man nor a Southerner. She was Vinnie Ream, the former protégé of Clark Mills, most famous for her likeness of Lincoln in the federal Capitol. Ream was an extremely complex figure who grew up in the West, in and out of the border states, and who managed to use this experience to play an ambiguous political role herself, moving successfully between radical Republicans and ex-Confederates.<sup>44</sup> She won the 1877 competition by producing an exacting likeness of Lee (the model does not survive) and by mobilizing a network of Southern congressmen to lobby on her behalf.<sup>45</sup>

The results of the competition, however, were never made public because the women's committee refused to accept them. Ream's gender was not enough to satisfy the women and may in fact have hurt her standing with them. Her lobbying practices had given her a notorious reputation, created largely by female critics in the Northern press. She also represented the very sort of popular sculptural practice the women's committee was trying to transcend; in their published letter refusing to sanction the competition, Sarah Randolph declared that "we have only one aim in view, which is to secure that which, being the noblest and most beautiful, will be the most appropriate."<sup>46</sup> Governor Kemper's failure to rally the women's committee behind his jury's choice effectively put an end to his

association's fund-raising hopes and left an opening for the women to advance their own competition, organized specifically to encourage European entries.

Ironically, though, the winner of this competition—Charles Niehaus—was not a European artist but a young, unknown German American sculptor from Ohio. The entrant with the greatest international standing, French sculptor Antonin Mercié, did not even receive honorable mention.<sup>47</sup> If Ezekiel's model was the standard of folly in the first competition, Mercié's performed the same role in the second. Written descriptions of the model indicate that Lee was depicted on a rearing horse, riding over "the shrieking and prostrate victims of a battle-field"—though Mercié later explained that the dying soldiers were meant to be Lee's own men, "stretching for a last affectionate glance of their leader."<sup>48</sup> This Napoleonic conception managed to violate the Lee cult's proscription on narrative display, the professional judges' notion of sculptural decorum, and the ladies' sense of gentility. Saint-Gaudens himself is said to have condemned the model as "an utter misconception of General Lee's character."<sup>49</sup> The common reaction to Mercié's entry from both the artist-judges and the popular press shows that there was some common ground between them, however polarized their positions. Both the professional and the popular schools of criticism condemned energetic narrative treatments because they threatened to confuse or even cancel the image of benign leadership the monument was supposed to project.

Nevertheless, the commission for the Lee Monument eventually went to this same Mercié, even though he had so completely botched the job in his competition entry. The prizewinner Niehaus was an untried sculptor, Mercié a known quantity. In fact, Saint-Gaudens knew him personally. Both had trained at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Paris, and Mercié was a model of the sort of academic professionalism Saint-Gaudens believed American sculpture needed.<sup>50</sup> For reasons that will never be clear—perhaps stemming from the amazing bobtail controversy—Niehaus's prizewinning design was rejected, and Saint-Gaudens persuaded the women's committee to give Mercié another chance by submitting a revised model. By this time, in the spring of 1886, the ladies' committee was finally in the process of officially merging with the governor's association, now headed by Governor Fitzhugh Lee, nephew of the hero himself. It appears that the women cut a deal with the governor: he could pick the site for the monument if they could choose the artist. Working together, they instructed Mercié to send a second model, and to represent the horse with all four feet on the ground. This simple instruction was enough to bring Mercié's new composition approximately into line with the prevailing image of Lee; that and a good deal of application to the fine points of likeness and costume (closely monitored by Governor Lee) finally led to



5.5 Antonin Mercié and Paul Pujol, Lee Monument, 1890, Monument Avenue, Richmond.

a contract with the artist.<sup>51</sup> Mercié's final design appropriately emphasized sobriety and stability (fig. 5.5). He showed Lee exerting only the slightest pressure on the reins; he spread the legs of the horse to the edges of the supporting plinth, and spread the legs of the rider to echo the slope of the pedestal (which was designed by Beaux-Arts-trained architect Paul Pujol). Seen from any side, therefore, the outlines of the monument form a graceful but stable pyramid, the equestrian group extending and fulfilling the directional flow of the pedestal.

Four feet on the ground and a good likeness: after all the controversy it turned out to be fairly straightforward to reconcile the demands of "truth" and the demands of "art," to satisfy both popular and professional tastes. After a concerted effort in the Virginia press to overturn the selection of Mercié, the artist's revised design calmed the fears of veterans and others with a stake in the Lee cult. "The soldiers will know him," trumpeted one Richmond headline; the article went on to relate how one Confederate veteran who saw the statue in the foundry "experienced all his old-time emotions, and his heart told him, 'That's Marse Robert!'"<sup>52</sup>

Still, Mercié had had to lobby hard for even the most minor departure from the canonical image of Lee on Traveller. The sculptor insisted, for example, on representing Lee bareheaded and with one side of his collar upturned to break the hard lines of the uniform. As long as he could argue that these innovations enhanced Lee's natural physical beauty, he remained on safe ground.<sup>53</sup> The ladies for their part succeeded in obtaining a work of impeccable craftsmanship elevated and transfigured by its elegant pedestal, as if the aesthetic values that were deliberately submerged in the hero's likeness could flourish in the nonrepresentational base, with its sensuous play of convex and concave surfaces. Here was an artistic achievement that could draw the admiration of someone like Henry James, who compared the monument to "some precious pearl of ocean washed up on a rude bare strand."<sup>54</sup>

James was here referring to the monument's barren site on the outskirts of the city, surely the most bizarre location ever chosen for a Beaux-Arts-designed monument. In a bold move Governor Lee had decided not to build the monument on the grounds of the State Capitol, where the original governor's association had planned to build and where every major public sculpture in the city had previously gone. Instead he chose to locate the monument in a plot of empty farmland owned by a local capitalist, who planned to transform the property into an elegant residential subdivision; the Lee Monument in this plan was to be the crowning feature of a new boulevard named Monument Avenue, which would serve as the suburban frontier of the city's western expansion. In the internal debate over the monument's site, Sarah Randolph of the ladies' committee had urged a serene park setting on the grounds of its "eternal fitness"; in other words she wanted the monument's surroundings to remain fixed in unchanging "nature," not in city neighborhoods that tended to rise and fall in economic cycles.<sup>55</sup> Certainly she did not want her project associated with a real estate venture that speculated blatantly on the prestige value of Lee and his monument.

But that is exactly what the governor's scheme was, "a plain business proposition" in his own words, and it soon paid off handsomely.<sup>56</sup> After a couple of decades in which the city formally annexed the property and actively promoted its development, Monument Avenue filled in and became the most fashionable address in town. The avenue became home to the city's elite—the "New South" elite of merchants, lawyers, and other professionals who had subsumed and displaced the old planter class. At the same time the avenue also became home to a whole series of major public monuments to Confederate leaders, which were placed on axis with the original monument to Lee; monuments to Jefferson Davis and J.E.B. Stuart erected in 1907 cemented the boulevard's new reputation. The decision to shift the Lee site away from the state Capitol and into the



5.6 Photograph of Monument Avenue, circa 1907, in Richmond Chamber of Commerce, *Richmond, Virginia, 1907*, n.p.

city's suburbs—ironically, made by a state governor—thus sparked a critical change in the monumental layout of the city. From now on the most important Confederate figures were memorialized in an entirely separate zone, a city-sponsored precinct fully integrated into the modern civic fabric and clearly intended to showcase civic progress. The development of this new Confederate boulevard in the interest of progress even swept away the remnants of earthworks left from the Confederate defense of Richmond, which had been preserved as important markers of the past.<sup>57</sup> Early promotional photographs of the avenue highlight this full-fledged embrace of modernity. In one image published in 1907 (fig. 5.6), the equestrian of Lee appears on the horizon, just off center, circumscribed within a linear network of residential amenities that are the real focus of the composition: the trees freshly planted in the grassy median and the adjoining strips of asphalt converge in perfect orthogonals on the distant monument; the telephone pole anchored in the foreground, dead center, towers beside the monument and holds a wire that skims just above the statue's head—all this framed in a filigreed oval. Such imagery made Lee's universe—and the institution of slavery which had been central to it—an ever more distant memory.

Unexpectedly, then, the once unpromising location of the Lee Monument turned out to have great symbolic value. It further cemented the depoliticization of Lee by moving him away from the old precinct of the Confederate Capitol and quite literally into the city of the future—a residential neighborhood not yet even built. Once the boulevard began to

fill in around the monument, it effectively asserted the continuity between old and new regimes, between the Confederate past and a modern South now oriented to the mainstream national values of business and progress. "We are all hunting for dollars," wrote the *New York Herald* at the monument's dedication, summing up its lesson of national reconciliation in strikingly unsentimental terms. The statement, reprinted approvingly in the Richmond papers, was corroborated by their various reports on the healthy prices commanded by the subdivided lots surrounding the monument.<sup>58</sup>

The monument in its suburban site thus managed to heal a number of divisions that had opened up in the course of the monument campaign. These were divisions between truth and art, between business and gentility, indeed between male and female elites. The gendering of the dispute had been particularly embarrassing to the white leadership, and the successful merger of the men's and women's efforts provided the symbolic closure necessary to complete the ritual of commemoration. The combination of masculine and feminine principles proved irresistible, both working in the service of a politics of white supremacy. The ladies' committee contributed a normative notion of culture in which art and virtue supposedly coincided. The governor contributed a "plain business proposition" with its vision of civic progress and private profit. Circumscribing and embellishing the equestrian likeness of Lee, these principles of culture and capitalist progress served to refine the statue's already subtle narrative of power. Just as the rider's brute mastery of the animal was disguised as a narrative of self-mastery—a relation of power transformed into a revelation of self—so the brute fact of white domination embodied in slavery was disguised as a lesson in the white man's own capacity for valor and achievement. Occasionally the disguise might be stripped off. After the cornerstone-laying ceremony in 1887, the *Richmond Dispatch* argued that the example of Lee vindicated the Old South and its slaveholding class: "Was there ever on this planet a nobler class of men?" The editorial went on to resurrect some of the standard planks of the proslavery argument familiar from antebellum times.<sup>59</sup> But by the time the monument was completed, the ritual steered clear of such overt defenses; ceremony and commentary were orchestrated to support the monument's assertion of mainstream values. The monument in its final incarnation thus clothed white power in an image of civilization—a civilization that presupposed whiteness as a kind of moral prerequisite.

"A people carves its own image in the monuments of its great men." Thus began Archer Anderson's oration at the dedication of the monument in May 1890.<sup>60</sup> The dedication ceremony was a huge ritual affair designed to construct an image of this collective, this "people," who had supposedly erected the monument. The ceremony deliberately rallied

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."<sup>61</sup> 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:

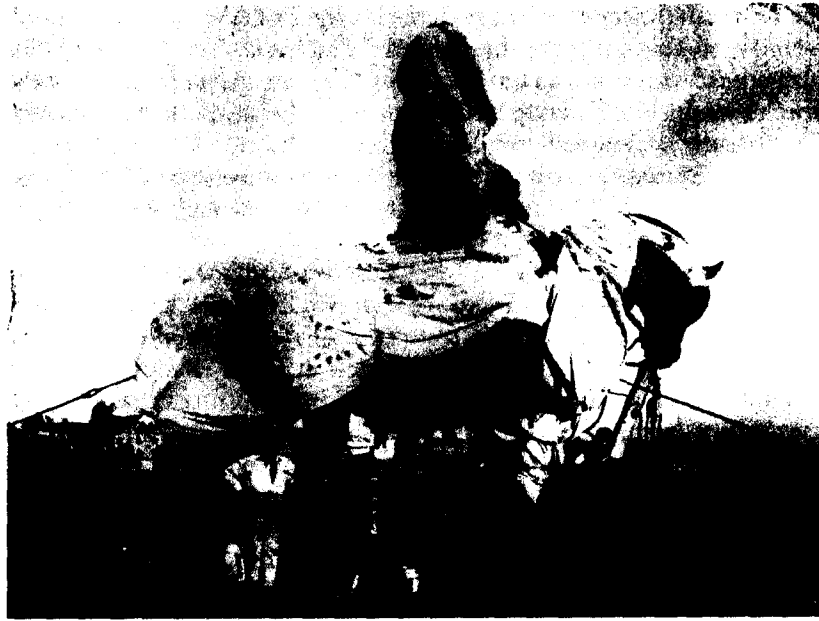
It is, besides and above all, the unique combination in him of moral strength with moral beauty, of all that is great in heroic action with all that is good in common life, that will make of this pile of stone a sacred shrine, dear throughout coming ages, not to soldiers only, but to all "helpers and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

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.<sup>63</sup> 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.<sup>64</sup> 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."<sup>65</sup> 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!'"<sup>66</sup> 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!'"<sup>67</sup> 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."<sup>68</sup> 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."<sup>69</sup> 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.<sup>70</sup> 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.<sup>71</sup>

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.

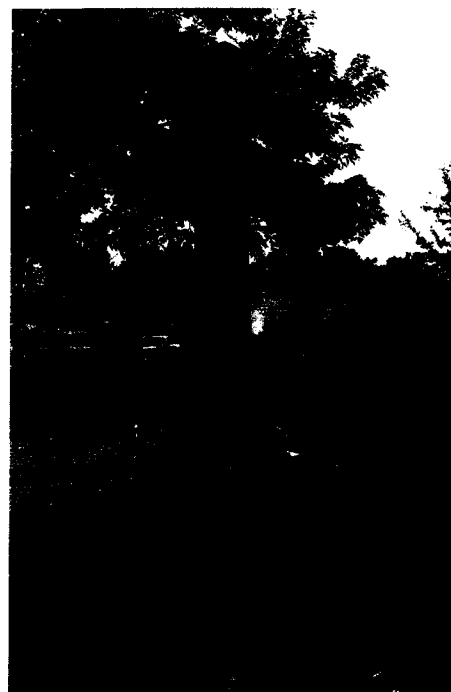
For the most part, of course, white observers did not read the imagery this way. They did not choose to see how white and black worlds might interlock and clash within the concrete reality of the monument. One notable exception, worth exploring in some detail, is Henry James, who saw the monument while 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."<sup>72</sup> 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."<sup>73</sup>

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—

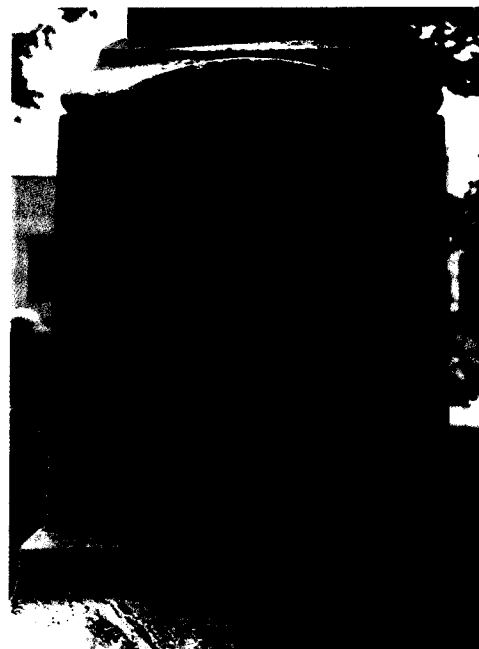
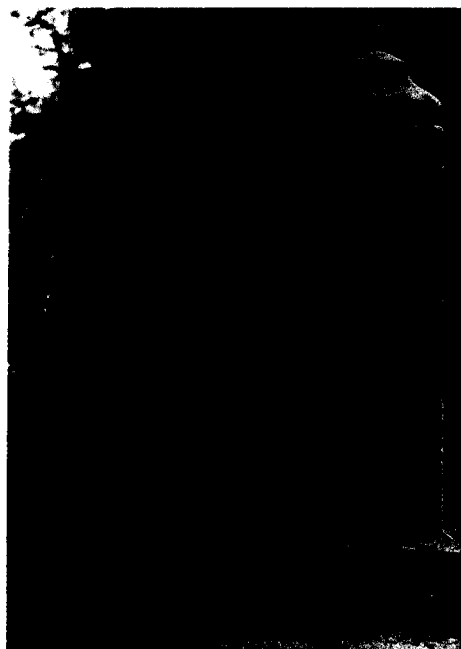
but as a kind of virus preying upon it. James himself felt profoundly "discomposed," even "threatened," by the sight of "tattermalion darkies" who "lounged and sunned themselves within range" at the Washington train station, or by the black teamsters in Richmond "who now emphasized for me with every 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."<sup>74</sup> 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.<sup>75</sup>

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."<sup>76</sup> 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.<sup>77</sup> 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*.<sup>78</sup> 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.<sup>79</sup> 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."<sup>80</sup>

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).<sup>81</sup> 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."<sup>82</sup> 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."<sup>83</sup> 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.<sup>84</sup>

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.<sup>85</sup> 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?<sup>86</sup>

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.<sup>87</sup> 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."<sup>88</sup> 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."<sup>89</sup>

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."<sup>90</sup> 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."<sup>91</sup> 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.<sup>92</sup>

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.