About the Cover

postmedieval: a journal of medieval cultural studies (2020). 11, 353–355.
<https://doi.org/10.1057/s41280-020-00206-4>

'Minneapolis-Police/Richmond-Statue.' Photo by Julie Rendleman. 2020.

This image was taken on 5 June 2020 by photojournalist Julie Rendleman/REUTERS. The picture captures a moment when two 14-year-old Black ballerinas, Kennedy George (L) and Ava Holloway (R), posed at the base of the monument to Confederate General Robert E. Lee in Richmond, Virginia. Virginia Governor Ralph Northam ordered the removal of the monument following civil unrest in the wake of the killing of George Floyd at the hands of Minneapolis police. The faux-Classical grey,¹ slate statue is juxtaposed by the vibrant graffiti that brings new meaning and life to the monument.

In many ways, the General Lee monument represents the old medieval studies. It relies on a false understanding of the past and a championing of tradition and conservatism. The fixed state of the statue speaks to the field's unwillingness to change, and the graffiti resonates as the voices of the unheard in the field, many of whom are represented in our special issue. However, the statue itself serves as more than just a symbolic image of the field. As Adam Miyashiro has remarked, 'white supremacy is transnational, deeply rooted in myths of white, "Anglo-Saxon" heritage, and structured in indigenous elimination. The intersections between settler colonialism, Islamophobia, and "white heritage" politics are tightly bound up with engagements with a medieval past that serves as a mythical template upon which white identity movements are fashioned and weaponized' (Miyashiro, 2016, 9). Thus, the unvandalized Lee statue is more than a static monument to America's past. Instead, it is a site of revision that draws on the mythologized history of 'Anglo-Saxon' heritage and supremacy in American culture.

Nevertheless, as Svetlana Boym writes, 'a monument is not necessarily something petrified and stable. Monuments are in metamorphosis' (Boym, 2001, 79). The graffiti on the monument reinscribes meaning on the statue, making it a symbol of anger and revolt – a site that demands justice and reparation. In addition to repeated statements of 'BLM' appear 'Save Black Lives' and 'Stop White Supremacy.' Beyond the frame, the statue now bears the demand, 'TEAR THIS DOWN,' written in capitalized letters on the right side of the monument. Although the words are not visible on the cropped cover image, this mandate, advocating for the destruction of the monument on which it is written, echoes the discourse of this volume. In this issue, we inscribe new words on the tradition of medieval scholarship, demanding that the field, as it is, be dismantled.

The two young, Black women featured in the image likewise stand as a memorial to those who have suffered under and fought against anti-Black racism in the United States and beyond. Their hands are raised in strength and solidarity with the Black Power Movement, and, positioned against the backdrop of the 'desecrated' statue, they challenge our ideas about culture, memory, history, and who is allowed to own and participate in white Western culture. As Seeta Chaganti has articulated in her book *Strange Footing*, 'Western dance has cleaved to protocols of professionalization that have, over time, become so

1 For further reading on the use of Greco-Roman inspired monuments and white supremacy see Mackrandilal (2017). Mackrandilal specifically discusses the Lee statue featured as our cover image. Heidi Morse (2018) also explores the white supremacist use of Classical Art. She remarks upon the historical use of Classical statues as evidence in pseudoscientific theories of racial difference, as well as the long tradition of these monuments as symbols of empire.

absorbing and extreme that in many spheres they reconfigure the very physiology of the dancer' (Chaganti, 2018, 4–5). Like the field of medieval studies, ballet in particular has a long history of gatekeeping designed to replicate nineteenth-century ideals of white, European beauty and art and to promote a sense of white 'ownership.' In 2015, Misty Copeland became the first Black principal dancer in American Ballet Theatre's 75-year history, and as of 2017, only 2.56% of ballerinas are Black.² Although ballet historically has been inaccessible to many people (particularly BIPOC), it masquerades as apolitical, excusing the lack of diversity by citing a 'lack of interest,' particularly on the part of Black dancers. This is not dissimilar to anti-Blackness within medieval studies, especially in early English studies. The young, Black ballerinas standing with raised fists undermine and repurpose what is perceived as white 'high' culture and tradition. This monument is their stage. This volume, likewise, is our stage. As our contributors challenge us to think more deeply about medieval studies – how it operates and for whom – we claim this site not just as a platform from which we might speak, but also a site where we might stage our revolt.

2 See 'Race and Ethnicity by Degrees Awarded' in the 'Ballet' section (Deloitte et al. 2020).

Acknowledgements

We would like to acknowledge and thank the English Department at the University of Connecticut for contributing to the permission of use of this image.

References

- Boym, S. 2001. *The Future of Nostalgia*. New York: Basic Books.
- Chaganti, S. 2018. *Strange Footing: Poetic Form and Dance in the Late Middle Ages*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Deloitte, Datawheel, and C. Hidalgo. 2020. Race and Ethnicity by Degrees Awarded. *DataUSA*. <https://datausa.io/profile/cip/ballet#demographics>.
- Mackrandilal, M. 2017. The Aesthetics of Empire: Neoclassical Art and White Supremacy. *contemporary*. 17 Nov. <https://contemporary.org/the-aesthetics-of-empire-neoclassical-art/>
- Miyashiro, A. 2016. Our Deeper Past: Race, Settler Colonialism, and Medieval Heritage Politics. *Literature Compass* 16(9–10): 1–11.
- Morse, H. 2018. Classics and the Alt-Right: Historicizing Visual Rhetorics of White Supremacy. *Learn, Speak, Act: Liberal Arts in the Moment*. University of Michigan. 5 February. <https://sites.lsa.umich.edu/learn-speak-act/2018/02/15/classics-and-the-alt-right/>

Publisher's Note Springer Nature remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.