

The Ghost in the Black Box: A Haunting in Negative Space

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Nestled in the sprawling suburbs just outside of Atlanta, Georgia, Stone Mountain looms large in the city's imagination. The second Ku Klux Klan (KKK) was established atop the mountain in 1915 and, with the help of the local chapter of the United Daughters of the Confederacy (UDC), laid the groundwork for the bas-relief of three Confederate figures on the mountain's face (Engebretson 2015). Stone Mountain can be many things to many people – it's a landscape and a naturescape, for instance – but, as a contested and contestable memoryscape fraught with racial politics, the space can never be politically neutral.

During the weeks leading up to Halloween, a visitor to the park surrounding the mountain might choose to purchase a memento that's a bit different from what one can ordinarily find there – a “Boo Box.” Boo Boxes are small gift boxes, tied shut with ribbon, and said to contain a ghost. Although deceptively simple-looking commodities, this article will argue that, far from being simple souvenirs, Boo Boxes, which are sold in conjunction with the annual ghost-story event “A Tour of Southern Ghosts,” are complex cultural products that tie together multiple networks of historical, political, and cultural negotiations over identity and memory at Stone Mountain. While similar to other tchotchkes sold in tourist gift shops across the world, Boo Boxes – like all such objects – are best historicized in relation to their place of origin. These particular boxes become most legible when they are seen as connected to the ghost tour, which they help fund, Stone Mountain, and, ultimately, the geographic US American South as a site of official and vernacular cultural memory-construction. That is, we focus on the “public,” or the “negative space,” surrounding the souvenir – the location of cultural production and the context of identity formation – because it is in this space, filled with social and cultural relationships, that the Boo Box gains its identity (cf. Ikegami 2000: 994–995). We argue that the box, and its negative spaces, can productively be understood as fantastic in a dialectical sense, and that this dialectic is crucial to the positioning of the Boo Box as a souvenir and Stone Mountain as an apolitical place of fun and recreation rather than one permeated by the ongoing legacies of slavery and white supremacy.

We will begin by outlining a critical theory of hauntology before showing how the Boo Box turns from a seemingly mundane object into something fantastic. We will then place the Boo Box in its larger context, analyzing its public negative spaces – Stone Mountain Park, Historic Square, and A Tour of Southern Ghosts – through textual analysis to show how it can be

understood to offer a choice between historical and ahistorical understandings of the local past and between politicized or depoliticized ways of engaging with a contentious space. We will do this through the analysis of not only the Boo Box itself but also official literature, news items, online photos, informal fieldwork, and a recording of some of the stories presented at “A Tour of Southern Ghosts” in the early 2000s. Boo Boxes provide a way to navigate the complicated network of meaning and understanding that occupy the negative public space surrounding them, while at the same time allowing the ghost inside to distract from what others would view as the true haunting of Stone Mountain.

Of Hauntings and Ghosts

When is a ghost not a ghost? In *Rhetorics of Fantasy*, Farah Mendlesohn understands the fantastic “as an area of literature that is heavily dependent on the dialectic between author and reader for the construction of a sense of wonder, [a] fiction of consensual construction of belief” (2008: xiii). This phrasing suggests that the fantastic shouldn’t be limited to literature in the traditional sense. If the fantastic is a rhetoric, or a language as Mendlesohn also argues, it could be understood to function in other texts and contexts as well.¹ That is, the fantastic in this sense can be seen to be operationalized not only in literary fictions, but also in everyday speech, in politics, or at heritage or memory sites. Really anywhere that language is used to foster a “sense of wonder” or to construct a sense of belief among listeners or visitors can be viewed as potentially fantastic. As such, fantastic rhetoric can be understood to be socially formative, inviting its audience to be co-creators of an image of how a society or the world should preferably be understood.

Take monsters, for example. Steven T. Asma outlines a theory of monsters as simultaneously repulsive and attractive; as something inhuman; and something unmanageable, claiming that monsters often represent a breakdown of intelligibility (2011: 10). In short, they are wondrous. Importantly, he also notes that monsters can be both literal and symbolic. People speak of monsters variously as actual (even if fictional) beings and, metaphorically, about people *as* monsters. “Monster,” he notes, is a cultural category (2011: 13) employed in many different domains by different people to different ends: “[W]e still employ the term and concept to apply to *inhuman* creatures of every stripe, even if they come from our own species. The concept of the monster has evolved to become a moral term in addition to a biological and theological term” (2011: 7). Monsters, then, aren’t born; they’re rhetorical. They are spoken into being, made monstrous to serve some purpose for the people doing the labeling. But monsters only exist when people credit their existence.

¹ Mendlesohn explicitly differentiates between the fantastic and the genre of fantasy, when she writes about “the way in which a text becomes fantasy or, alternatively, the way the fantastic enters the text and the reader’s relationship to this” (2008: xiv).

The same can be said about ghosts. They can also be understood as a cultural category, spoken into being by rhetorical means. In this framing, ghosts haunt people in both literal and symbolic ways, through fictions of consensual belief. Those fictions can be explicit, marked by a rhetoric of the fantastic, or implicit, marked by silence and haunted by the ghosts of the past, as the term “hauntology” is often used to suggest. In proposing a critical hauntology, Martha Lincoln and Bruce Lincoln note that “contemporary hauntologists have primarily concerned themselves with literary representations and figures of the imaginary” in their discussions of cultural and historical hauntings (2015: 194). In much hauntological writing, ghosts turn into “ghostly” signals and traces, into figurative rather than literal figures, as with the metaphorical monsters above. Ghosts, specters, phantoms, and hauntings then become evocative tropes of troubled memory work, serving as metaphors for political interpretation. This is what Lincoln and Lincoln term *secondary haunting*: “a process in which living authors recount to large audiences the injustices suffered by the victims of brutal regimes, not with the hope of putting anyone to rest, but to mobilize a moral community to prevent such atrocities in the future” (2015: 195). As such, secondary haunting isn’t concerned with the fantastic; it may be utopian, in its hope for redress or change, but its focus is historical.

This transformation, write Lincoln and Lincoln, leaves little or no room for “haunting as something consistent with, and rooted in, [individuals’ or social groups’] cosmology, ontology, and psychology” (2015: 195). After all, ghosts are also theorized as something other than metaphor. Indeed, ideas about ghosts are common among people who view “spiritual existence” as no less real than material existence.² Lincoln and Lincoln remind us that “[g]iving attention to such materials and the culturally specific beliefs that render them credible seems a necessary precondition to any serious discussion of haunting, metaphoric or not” (2015: 197). This is what they call *primary haunting*: “when a single spirit (or a small group) confronts and terrifies a small number of the living, transforming a situation where the dead alone suffer disquiet into one where the living share their state of anxiety and anguish, and are prompted to take moral action so that the living and the dead can share a righteous peace” (2015: 210).³

At first glance, neither primary nor secondary haunting seem fitting labels to put on the Boo Boxes or “A Tour of Southern Ghosts” we discuss below. Both can be called negative-space, liminal cases of haunting, and how they are understood can be suggestive of which type of haunting is more likely to attract a Boo Box-buyer or ghost story-listener. This is unsurprising: ghost

² There are other ways of understanding or relating to “ghosts,” “haunting,” and other conceptions of “spiritual” planes and beings that are irreducible to the “unquiet dead.” The model of hauntology used in this article does not and cannot address such conceptions.

³ Other forms of primary haunting include “occupational ghostlore,” such as stories about ghosts who appear to warn fishermen or airline staff of impending trouble, which might be shared within limited – occupationally defined – frameworks (Santino 1988: 217).

stories as a form can be concerned with either an “outer” or an “inner” world, and can be used to work through human impulses viewed as destructive just as readily as to negotiate social, cultural, economic, or political threats.⁴ As such, they can easily point towards primary haunting with ghosts positioned as real, metaphysical entities or towards secondary haunting, where ghosts are understood as residues of horrific historical events or tropes for collective memory and collective trauma.⁵ Whatever their focus, however, ghost stories tend to “challenge the rational order or the observed laws of nature, though they may do so in a variety of ways, reintroducing what is perceived as fearful, alien, excluded, or dangerously marginal” (Briggs 2012: 176). In their own ways, Boo Boxes and the Tour’s ghost-stories do the same, reveling in what Julia Briggs calls ghost-stories’ chief source of power: “[t]he ambivalence or tension is between certainty and doubt, between the familiar and the feared, between rational occurrence and the inexplicable” (2012: 176).

More concretely, especially as far as ghost tours, ghost tourism, and ghost stories are concerned, ghosts can function as indexes for how certain histories are viewed or remembered. By this definition, ghosts are creatures of the past that occupy a time not their own. They signify a time gone by and can help people process their own time and think about the future, writes Tiya Miles. She argues that “[s]ince ghosts are essentially about the past—that is, historical—the modern ghost story can be understood as a popular form of historical narrative” (2015: 14). Understood in this way, ghost stories can be framed as a form of history- or memory-making, “a cultural process by which we create, use, and understand history” (2015: 14). This, she emphasizes, can make ghost stories a way to preserve or address events that have been otherwise forgotten and, as such, a potentially radical form of storytelling. But, we would add, they can also be a means to facilitate forgetting. Ghosts can haunt in different, sometimes contradictory ways, even at a single site.

Ghost stories capture ghosts and present them to audiences, no matter how frightening, in a contained and controlled form (cf. Goldstein, Grider and Thomas, 2007: 2; Briggs 2012: 177). Boo Boxes literalize this containment process in a nicely wrapped package. While both our examples are commoditized and packaged for consumption, they’re still more like folkloric ghosts than contemporary, mass-market popular culture ones as they’re offered in more intimate, face-to-face settings than mass-mediated ghosts.⁶ While it’s impossible to prove or measure belief in ghosts in any concrete

⁴ For example, Charles Dickens’ *A Christmas Carol* “appeals to Victorian middle-class smugness while exposing the forces of poverty, greed, and ruthlessness that simultaneously maintained and threatened his society” (Briggs 2012: 180). Cf. p. 183 in Briggs.

⁵ E.g., Briggs 2012: 183: “In an age haunted by the unnumbered ghosts of those who died in horror and pain at the hands of other human beings, the ghost story can only figure as a form of light relief.” Also p. 180.

⁶ Cf. Ben-Amos’ influential definition of folklore as “artistic communication in small groups” (1971: 13).

way, Stone Mountain's ghosts must be studied with full acknowledgment that, no matter how deep the impact of post-Enlightenment rationalism, popular culture figurations of ghosts, and technological advances, the reality of ghosts, hauntings, and the unquiet dead is still very much an open question to many. In survey after survey, significant numbers of US Americans say they believe in ghosts, hauntings, or claim to have otherwise communed with the dead (e.g. Lyons 2005; Lipka 2015; Kambhampaty 2021; cf. Miles 2015: 14). It's impossible to say how accurate these numbers are, since some people are reluctant to credit ghost stories in public for fear of negative consequences (Santino 1988). But the fact that large numbers say they believe in ghosts or act as though they do means that, at the very least, we should consider ghosts a social fact (cf. Herzog 2018). After all, as Tiya Miles notes, "[s]trong belief in the existence of ghosts persists in [US] American culture, and that belief does historical work" (2015: 14). Thus, whether packaged as primary, secondary, or liminal, hauntings speak ghosts into being and, in the process, present those being haunted with choices about which past to engage with.

Commodifying the Fantastic

Ghost in a Box

an official

"Tour of Southern Ghosts"

souvenir

BOO Y'ALL!™

Stuck to the front of every Boo Box is a label proudly proclaiming it as a souvenir. These decorated boxes are said to "contain a 'ghost' and 'ghost food'" and are priced at \$5 in the A Tour of Southern Ghosts gift shop located in an old schoolhouse (Anonymous 2018). Also attached to the top of every box is a small pamphlet asking buyers to "Adopt a Ghost." Each year, Boo Boxes are crafted by volunteers in a local women's club to benefit the Tour operator, ART Station, a not-for-profit arts center located in an old trolley car barn in Stone Mountain Village. As a souvenir, the Boo Box is a commodity: aside from referencing, however obliquely, an idealized heritage of "Southern ghost stories" (discussed below), it is also a commercial product that transforms volunteer labor into exchange-value (for ART Station) and use-value (for buyers) (cf. Kelly 2009: 93; Cave and Buda 2018: 712–713). Its use value is largely emotional or symbolic. Through the purchase of a Boo Box, visitors are offered not only a chance to contain and domesticate ghosts, but to own them. They are fantastic objects.

Our claim isn't that Boo Boxes are fantastic objects because they contain ghosts and can be yours for the low, low price of \$5 a box. Instead, the box in its closed form exists in a liminal state, one which Tzvetan Todorov refers to as the fantastic. In Todorov's view, the fantastic is "that hesitation experienced by a person who knows only the laws of nature, confronting an apparently supernatural event" (1975: 25). The fantastic must always be considered in relation to what is real and what is not, and, most importantly, "*someone* must choose between them" (1975: 27). Since the ghost in question has no mass, there's no added weight to the box. The only way for a person to be sure whether a ghost inhabits it is to open the box. Then, and only then, can the box be confidently declared a mundane object with little importance attached to it and likely thrown out just like nearly any other piece of cardboard in the USA (US EPA 2023). While we cannot know for sure what people do with their Boo Boxes after purchase, we can say that, by remaining closed, they offer a person the ability to safely commune with the fantastic indefinitely.

So too can happiness perhaps be brought about by a Boo Box in its commodified form. In *Haunting Experiences*, Diane E. Goldstein, Sylvia Ann Grider, and Jeannie Banks Thomas interviewed ghost tour attendees about their beliefs around the supernatural and why they attended ghost tours. Contrary to some academic critiques of these commercialized and commodified experiences as theatrical, shallow, and ahistorical (read: "inauthentic"), they found that attendees did not hold the same reservations. In fact, just as with Miles' findings, tour-goers enjoyed the "inauthentic," theatrical nature of ghost tours because it offered a sense of safety. They wanted to see ghosts on the tours, but at the same time, they did not. The "inauthentic," commodified experience provided both the perfect opportunity to commune with, and shelter from, any actual supernatural entities (2007: 197–198). As a commodified supernatural object, the same can be said for Boo Boxes. With the label and the pamphlet both proclaiming that the box contains a ghost, and little evidence to the contrary unless one were to open the box, Boo Boxes offer the same kind of balanced experience for a buyer. They know they have purchased an inauthentic object – a souvenir – but as long as the box stays closed, buyers can hold out hope that one day, the ghost might emerge.

As the Boo Box is a souvenir meant to commemorate a specific time, place, and experience, the particulars hold weight. Layer by layer, as a souvenir is constructed, meanings take shape in the negative space around it. These meanings are not fixed. They stretch and transform with each added layer of context. The power of a souvenir to affect people is not overt but subtle and ever-present. They afford different possibilities for buyers through layers of cultural context (cf. Davis 2020). Shape, color, placement, time, and space all play a part to transform any mundane object into a fantastic one encoded with meaning and subtext (Goldstein, Grider and Thomas 2007:

174). Through his greater point about the humility of objects and the power they hold, Daniel Miller maintains that objects should not be thought of in isolation but instead as an interconnected system with the power to socialize people (Miller 2009: 51–54). In other words, an object does not exist alone. Every commodified souvenir, such as a saint’s relic or piece of the Berlin Wall, is surrounded by its own meanings and imaginings – its own negative spaces – all starkly different from that of the Boo Box.

The box itself is our way in to better interrogate the networks of differing and intersecting discourses that surround it. Here we understand networks as defined by Eiko Ikegami, where the term “‘networks’ implies not only concrete external and measurable social ties [...] but also shifting cognitive associational maps perceived inwardly in the form of narrative ‘stories’” (2000: 996). Over time, these stories reproduce and begin to form “a relatively coherent network of meaning.” Diverging from Ikegami, we are not so much concerned with matters of agency in the actualization of a network as we are with social structures and conditions of possibility for cultural production and identity formation, which are made more visible as the stories begin to form a network. Much like amassing water droplets, this reproduction or change in quantity of stories always leads to qualitative changes, the specifics of which “are often sensitively dependent on historical trajectories, and as such are unpredictable even in principle” (2000: 1004–1005). This unpredictability makes it impossible to trace every aspect of a network branching out from a single point (our Boo Box), yet there are some lines we can see more clearly than others. These lines link to an assemblage of networks in the realms of history, memory, and storytelling that help to foster the viability and sustained existence of a dominant public.

Stone Mountain: A Fantastic Memoryscape

Stone Mountain Park is many things to many people. It’s a space with broad appeal that offers many different kinds of experiences to its circa three million yearly visitors. At its most basic, the park is a 3,200-acre naturalscape centered on the “stone mountain” from which it takes its name: the world’s largest granite outcrop, visible for miles around. Stone Mountain offers a variety of outdoor activities, from day hikes up the dome, camping and glamping, and even artificial snow sledding on the great lawn. It’s also a theme park that attracts visitors looking for experiences as varied as “a songbird preserve, a cable car ride, a scenic railroad, a miniature golf course and two full-size 18-hole courses, a seasonal outdoor park with life-size dinosaur replicas and a seasonal indoor dinosaur-themed play area,” as well as a “Historic Square” consisting of a collection of houses built between 1793 and 1875 and moved to the park in the 1960s (Author Unknown nd; Stone Mountain Guide nd). Additionally, Stone Mountain has what a writer for the widely circulated *Condé Nast Traveler* magazine describes as attractive features for “history buffs,” including tours in an amphibious World War II vehicle (Bradley

Franklin, nd). Perhaps its biggest attraction is the free – and immensely popular – laser show with fireworks that has been a summer-month staple since 1983. As such, Stone Mountain could also be described as what Tom O’Dell calls an experiencescape: a “strategically planned, laid out and designed” landscape, organized to attract consumers seeking certain experiences (2005: 16). Among the most popular experiences offered are those discussed in this article: the Historic Square, the Tour, and the world’s largest Confederate memorial.

As an experiencescape, what one can read in the dominant public space, Stone Mountain does not fit with the traditional understanding of dark tourism which is “about death and the dead” (Stone 2018: viii). *The Darker Side of Travel* suggests a slightly more specific definition of dark tourism where it is about “death, suffering and the seemingly macabre” (Sharpley 2009: 10). Neither definition fits with a view of Stone Mountain and certainly not our Boo Box. The ghost in our box is just that – a ghost that never died nor experienced death. When considering the park itself, the closest one can get to discussions about the dead there are on two occasions. First, during the laser light show when General Robert E. Lee, the leader of the Confederate army and one of the most revered figures of the Confederacy, sheds a tear for the Southern men who died during the Civil War before breaking his sword, and second, while listening to ghost stories during A Tour of Southern Ghosts. In the first instance, the dead are faceless and nameless – mere props for the greater symbolism of the moment. In the second, they are ahistorical phantasma used largely for a light scare or comedic relief. There is nothing macabre in either instance, as the dominant public space discourse does not allow for it. This is to be expected from a commercial standpoint. Most virtual experiences must offer “an aesthetic appeal in order to attract customers,” notes Lynn Hunt. Just as “the slaves at Colonial Williamsburg cannot suffer too much” (Hunt 2018: 27), the ghosts at Stone Mountain cannot speak too much of “their own” time, lest listeners begin to consider the dissonance between story and history. Instead, you have to interrogate the unspoken history of the space to learn about the true dead and a far more macabre history than one would find in a Stone Mountain gift shop.

Making Memories at Stone Mountain

Historic Square, the ghost tour, and the memorial carving will be addressed below, but we must first address the park’s place within a larger Southern memoryscape. This network comprises both concrete relations (political, social, economic) and structures – including constructed ones like monuments – as well as intangible, narrative or representational cultural structures (stories) that constitute a wider network that helps constitute a contested and contestable public. Cultural memory doesn’t present an image of the past as it was, but rather an image of the past that can serve a group’s needs in the present. The Square, Tour, and memorial can be regarded as *lieux de mémoire*,

sites where a particular image of the past is concentrated. They signify “moments of history, torn away from the movement of history, then returned” (Nora, 1989: 12). Such sites provide important conditions of possibility for the formation and perpetuation of memory since, as Jan Assmann notes, “[m]ajor elements of culture [...] have the task of keeping alive a memory that has no support in everyday life” (Assmann 2006: 10–11).

Assmann is focused on religion, but things like national and regional identities also need support. Just as national identities can be imagined into being and maintained through shared symbols and stories, and supported by seemingly innocuous or “banal” signifiers like flags or currency (cf. Anderson 2006; Billig 1995), so too are regional identity formations dependent on explicit and banal support. Memory-making can happen through official, public channels and through vernacular, private channels – or, as in the case of Stone Mountain, through public-private partnerships. Memory-sites, other memory-aids like stories, and supportive social structures are threaded throughout Georgia, providing the conditions of possibility for Old South and Lost Cause memories and attendant identity formations at Stone Mountain (cf. Ikegami 2000: 995–997, 1001–1002). The Lost Cause narrative positions the Confederacy not as secessionists who fought to uphold white supremacy and the system of chattel slavery, but as principled defenders of state’s rights and a noble civilization, the so-called Old South (Cox 2019; Churchwell 2022: 8).

As an example of more “banal” conditions for regional identity formation, many Georgian roads and streets are named after Confederate figures or other signifiers of the antebellum South. Tara Blvd. in Jonesboro, for example, is named after the fictional plantation in Margaret Mitchell’s Atlanta-set *Gone With the Wind*, the world’s “most popular romance with the American Civil War and its aftermath” and an influential purveyor of the Lost Cause and Old South narratives (Churchwell 2022: 8). Albeit increasingly contentious, street names like these keep the Confederacy close to the surface of everyday life and cultural memory.⁷ Stone Mountain’s official address is 1000 Robert E. Lee Blvd. This is the road through which most visitors enter the park, connecting the space to a wider network of Confederate street-names. The Historic Square is sandwiched between Lee Blvd., Jefferson Davis Drive – named after the President of the Confederacy –, and John B. Gordon Drive, named after another Confederate general. Most of the other recreational areas are ringed in by Stonewall Jackson Drive, yet another much-celebrated Confederate general. Confederate symbolism, then, is inscribed into the very (infra)structure of Stone Mountain.

⁷ Two things are worth noting here: first, struggles over street names are taking place, which might signal changes in the overall conception of what the South is or can be (cf. Cooper and Knotts 2010: 75); second, the retention of such names might serve as proxies for the persistence of racially discriminatory practices (Williams 2021).

So, while Stone Mountain is positioned as a space for fun and recreation, it's also undoubtedly a "politically charged realm where power relations are played out, political interests are materialized, cultural identities are contested and dreams are redefined" (O'Dell 2005: 18). The Lost Cause and Old South offer attractive cultural memories for what still remains the dominant "public" in the area: that is, the "negative space" comprised of the structures most privileged by long-term political influence, racial formation, and socio-economic standing (cf. Ikegami 2000: 995, 1009). Through constant repetition, these narratives offer a sense of imagined community to people who perceive themselves as sharing a cultural identity based on an ostensibly noble heritage. Georgia, the South, and the rest of the USA remain littered with Confederate monuments erected during particularly vitriolic periods of racial and social formation in the post-Civil War USA, especially between the 1890s–1930s and after 1954. As will be discussed presently, Stone Mountain Park was created as part of the second monument boom and the attempts behind it to uphold white supremacy.

This is largely elided in the public-private representation of the Lost Cause and Old South at Stone Mountain and in other, similar, Southern experience- or memoryscapes. This is unsurprising: as Aleida Assmann has noted, "[i]n order to remember some things, other things must be forgotten" (Assmann 2008: 98; 2006: 57). Forgetting can be active, effected through destruction or censorship, or passive as things are lost, hidden, neglected, or the like (Assmann 2008: 98–99). Both types of forgetting take place at Stone Mountain. Lost Cause and Old South memories, and the stories, places, symbols, and structures that can promote them become canonical, while anything that doesn't fit with – or contradicts – them, is forgotten.

Canonization implies selection (and, with selection, power struggles) as well as ascription of value, with the goal of securing long-term durability (Assmann 2008: 100). Similarly, Ikegami notes that, "once they emerge as collective cultural representations and are retained in collective memory in narrative or representational form, symbolic emerging properties manifest their own dynamic course and persist even when the network base that originally produced them disappears" (2000: 1006, 996). The impetuses behind the Confederate monuments-booms, as well as the construction of Old South and Lost Cause imaginaries, are largely past, but their concrete and less tangible traces – monuments and stories, for example – remain, as do the networks and publics that they helped form and sustain. However, what is forgotten, but not destroyed, is still accessible to others. And as the Old South and Lost Cause narratives are increasingly coming into question through, for example, social history, public history, protests, and movements like Black Lives Matter, places like Stone Mountain are becoming more important for the identity formations and cultural production being challenged. Like ghosts, the Lost Cause and Old South must be spoken into being through rhetorical means; and like ghosts, not everybody believes in them. These narratives, and

Stone Mountain itself, are highly contested and contestable, and subject to both secondary and primary hauntings, to which we now turn.

Forgetting Carved in Stone

Stone Mountain's perhaps most well-known cultural feature and arguably the centerpiece of the park is an unfinished, 158ft/48-meter tall monument featuring a relief carving of General Lee, General Thomas Jonathan "Stonewall" Jackson, and President Davis on horseback. The carving is the largest Confederate monument ever erected and the largest bas-relief carving in the world. It is also a memory-site around which generations of collective cultural representations, through a mix of repetition and selective forgetting, have become embedded.

A monument at Stone Mountain was first proposed in 1914, championed by the UDC, who had long been vocal proponents of Lost Cause narratives and leaders of the first monuments-boom (Cox 2019), and funded in part by the KKK. The first decades of the 1900s were a period of renewed interest in erecting Confederate monuments, which coincided with the codification of segregating Jim Crow laws in the South and the rebirth of the KKK atop Stone Mountain in 1915 (cf. Brandt and Herrington 2022: 65; Alexander 2011: 30–35; Kruse 2007: 50ff.; cf. Anderson 2017: 39–66). All of this, and much more, was done in challenge to changes to the South's social and racial order that had taken place during and since the post-Civil War Reconstruction era. This resistance was also dramatized in D. W. Griffith's widely influential and KKK-romanticizing movie, *The Birth of a Nation* (1915).⁸ Work on the carving began in 1923 but had stopped completely by 1928, due to personal conflicts, funding difficulties, and technical issues. The fact that the work was begun, and was supported, speaks to the existence of an anti-segregationist public that sought to reassert its primacy in the political, cultural, and natural landscape, over and against other resistant counterpublics (cf. Ikegami 2000: 1008–1011). And it provided conditions for later publics to form around similar ideas.

A new boom of Confederate monument-building began following the rise of a civil rights movement and challenges to Jim Crow racial segregation, including the Supreme Court's decision in the 1954 case *Brown vs. Board of Education* that in principle (if not in practice) ended school segregation. The state of Georgia joined in the backlash in several ways. Confederate battle flags ("Stars and Bars") became increasingly prominent political symbols in the South from the late 1940s onward to the extent that even Georgia's own state flag was changed to include a Confederate design in 1956. Work at Stone Mountain resumed during this period. In 1958, the state of Georgia founded the Stone Mountain Memorial Association, with a mission to create "a perpetual memorial to the Confederacy." The Association bought the land and

⁸ *Birth* led to increases in KKK membership, racialized violence across the USA, and was the first movie screened at the White House (cf. Ang 2023).

helped finance the carving, alongside commissioning a private partner to assemble and run what would become an “antebellum plantation” attraction (Brandt and Herrington 2022: 63–66; Bevan 2022: 36–37). This public-private relationship remains to this day: the land is public but the park is operated by a private actor.

The carving is a monument, and monuments are, at their core, assertions of power (Hunt 2018: 9). The project was a reminder that, “regardless of the mounting fight for civil rights, antebellum racial hierarchies would remain intact,” and was part of the Southern strategy of “massive resistance” to desegregation (Brandt and Herrington 2022: 64, 66; cf. Webb 2005). That is, from inception to grand opening as a segregated park, Stone Mountain Park was built on a public-private foundation of “white rage” – a backlash against Black advancement in the USA effected through systematic means – that was spreading through the country in the aftermath of Reconstruction and *Brown* (Anderson 2017: 1–6, 67–97). Work on the carving continued and wasn’t officially concluded until 1972, but even in its unfinished state it constitutes a literal inscription of the three Confederate personages as larger-than-life figures to be looked up to.

This is all the more noteworthy when one considers that, as a reporter for NPR notes, Stone Mountain’s ties to the Confederacy are weak: “While the imagery on the carving calls to mind the Civil War, no battles were fought at Stone Mountain. None of the three men was from Georgia, and the carving isn’t even that old, having been finished in 1972” (Moffatt 2021). The non-threatening figures, with their hats in front of their hearts, stand in silent witness to the Old South and the Lost Cause, and their presence in the Southern landscape and memoryscape is naturalized. Perhaps no better indication of how banal they have become, while still remaining firmly at the center of a collective field of vision, is the fact that the three men on horseback are at the heart of the popular laser light show, which through a form of active and conspicuous forgetting tells their stories without any mention of their roles in supporting and sustaining chattel slavery or white supremacy.

Anti-historical Historic Square

The second major site – a cultural production in every sense of the word – is the “Historic Square.” Historic Square is a recent name; previously it was called Stone Acres Plantation, then Antebellum Plantation. Aside from the name-change, however, the site remains “strikingly unaltered” from its original form (Brandt and Herrington 2022: 80). The Antebellum plantation originally contained not only a plantation house, but also an overseer’s house and two slave dwellings, relocated there from rural Georgia (Brandt and Herrington 2022: 63).

In many ways, it resembles other tourist plantations, of which there are a large number. The major difference is that, unlike most tourist plantations, there’s nothing in Stone Mountain’s past that positions it in any “obvious”

way as a place for celebrating the Old South or for venerating the Lost Cause because there was never a plantation there until one was assembled and optimized for tourist consumption. The houses weren't so much "moved from [their] original site and carefully restored to preserve [their] authenticity and historical value," as the Park's website claims, but rather concentrated to offer white tourists a chance to experience the "storybook Old South" as exemplified in the deracinated, whitewashed 1939 blockbuster movie *Gone With the Wind*,⁹ and packaged as "a polished fantasy of White leisure" (Stone Mountain Park nd; Brandt and Herrington 2022; cf. Maland 2007: 248–251; Butler 2001: 171–172).

Nevertheless, when the Antebellum Plantation was first opened, it was billed as an authentic Civil War-era scene. Visitors were prompted to "marvel at the antique furniture and decorative arts on display, the possessions of a make-believe planter family" (Brandt and Herrington 2022: 63). Plans for a space honoring Margaret Mitchell were abandoned because they would disrupt the illusion of authenticity and "break the spell of being carried back in time" (Brandt and Herrington 2022: 70). That spell is strong at Stone Mountain and other tourist plantations: visitors often leave thinking they've experienced antebellum life as it was (Butler 2001: 173).¹⁰ Stone Mountain is also similar to other tourist plantations in its emphasis on the architecture and furnishings, not on enslaved peoples or slavery, which, when mentioned, is more often than not related to planters' generosity (Brandt and Herrington 2022: 77–78; Butler 2001; Rice 2009: 227–232). The big house highlights how an imagined planter family spent its money, not how that money was made (Brandt and Herrington 2022: 76; cf. Rice 2009: 227). As Lydia Mattice Brandt and Philip Mills Herrington repeatedly emphasize, this presentation is to a great extent an anti-historical fantasy: it implicitly guarantees that the plantation's imagined family were not abusive slave-owners, and by extension invites visitors to marvel at the Old South's "way of life" and to be co-constructors of a long-promoted belief that this way of life was benign and worth preserving or aspiring to.

Thus, while it's undeniably true that Stone Mountain offers much for "history buffs," the claim comes with some caveats. Historic Square is almost completely fabricated, but the traces of that fabrication are carefully hidden. The site is historic in name only: it's an assembled hodgepodge of structures from around the state, built across several decades, moved to Stone Mountain, and arranged to produce an image of pastness rather than to evoke any specific past (Brandt and Herrington 2022: 69). The plantation house was subject to

⁹ In the early planning stages, the Stone Mountain Memorial Association even considered building a replica of the plantation house from the movie (Brandt and Herrington 2022: 64, 67).

¹⁰ And the spell is continually reinforced. After the big house burned in November, 2023, a representative of the park's police force reiterated the authenticity-claim: "Everything in there represents the 1800s. It's all antiques [...] It's just a historic representation of the 1860s" (FOX 5 Atlanta Digital Team 2023).

major exterior and interior alterations, to the extent that the structure that was put up at Stone Mountain in 1961–1962 bore little resemblance to the one that had been disassembled in southwest Georgia in the years prior (Brandt and Herrington 2022: 73–74). The alterations allowed for a particular narrative and aesthetic arrangement of the space, a *Gone With the Wind*-inflected simulacrum of a plantation that combined many images without an original. The arrangement offered both a fantasy of the antebellum South and a style for visitors to admire or aspire to for their own homes (Brandt and Herrington 2022: 71; Butler 2001: 171–172).

The result was, and remains, a domestic image of plantations as opulent leisure spaces for white planter families and tourists alike, with only marginal references to chattel slavery and none to racialized violence (Brandt and Herrington 2022: 76–77). Thus, the Confederacy can be said to haunt Stone Mountain in a dual sense. To those who lament the Lost Cause and Old South, the recreated plantation might suggest ghostly traces of a lost, idealized way of life, perhaps a specter of what might have been or further changes yet to come. To those who, more historically, view the Civil War as a war over slavery and white supremacy, it may be the specter of the racialized and brutal socio-economic formation that made that way of life possible. The latter is common enough – to quote one local resident, “this land is bloodstained with the blood and bones of our ancestors” (Shah 2018) – but the park’s public-private memory-construction unmistakably privileges the former.

Fantastic White Supremacy

To the extent that Stone Mountain Park is a heritage site, then, it’s a wholly fabricated heritage (cf. Lowenthal 1998) that, in the monument and plantation, foregrounds a whitewashed image of plantation life, the socio-economic system that propped it up, and white supremacy, deliberately championed by the KKK, the UDC, the state of Georgia, and the Stone Mountain Memorial Association, among others. Although some efforts have been made to delink the plantation, monument, and park from the violent, racist histories they were made to simultaneously memorialize and forget – the plantation has been renamed and fewer Confederate flags are flown, for example – it’s still fair to say that the privately operated “plantation and the mountain are constituent parts of a state-sponsored landscape of White supremacy” (Brandt and Herrington 2022: 63), as are other parts of the park. The park today may not be primarily an expression of white supremacy in an ideological sense (i.e., the notion that the “white race” is superior), nor in the sense that it celebrates and props up a political system built on racial separation despite this being a reason for its inception (cf. Fredrickson 1981; 2002). However, the monument and plantation continue to prop up white supremacy in an epistemological sense, by providing conditions for white supremacist identity formation.

According to Charles W. Mills, “[w]hite supremacy is the unnamed political system that has made the modern world what it is today” (Mills 1997: 1). In this sense, white supremacy is a sociopolitical paradigm that rests on what Mills describes as a “racial contract” between “those categorized as white over the nonwhite.” Through misrepresentation, evasion, and self-deception, this racial contract provides the foundations for white supremacist societies and polities, but requires an “epistemology of ignorance” to determine what counts as a “correct” and “objective” interpretation of the world. “One has to learn to see the world wrongly, but with the assurance that this set of mistaken perceptions will be validated by white epistemic authority” (Mills 1997: 18–19).

This ignorance promotes and facilitates the kinds of fantasy offered by the plantation and carving’s deracinated Lost Cause or Old South narratives – both of which can be described as fantastic, as fictions of consensual construction of belief. The Historic Square and carving validate those narratives for those who have consented to them. But any narrative or signification of the antebellum or Civil War-era South is necessarily fraught with opposition (cf. Miles 2015: 31). At a place like Stone Mountain, with its histories of erasure and manifest white supremacy, it could be no other way. In recent years, as criticism of Stone Mountain has grown, so has the potential for secondary haunting. Even when wholly erased, marginalized, or portrayed as content and servile, Black US Americans are never – and can never be – completely absent from stories about a time when their forced labor built an economy and supported a society for others. No matter how vehemently one might claim that the Civil War was about states’ rights or that veneration of the Confederacy was about “heritage,” the specters of white supremacy and the defense of slavery that motivated secession cannot be ignored. At every turn, to use the language of secondary hauntology, the ghosts of slavery, the Confederacy, and the continuing history of Southern white supremacy remain, if perhaps only at the edge of the field of historical vision for some. For the carving and plantation to continue offering a sense of wonder amenable to memory- and heritage-making, and for Stone Mountain to avoid becoming a death-defined dark tourism destination, the history they always suggest must be actively forgotten. The active public-private forgetting we’ve addressed so far is compounded by passive vernacular types of forgetting, as seen in *A Tour of Southern Ghosts*.

The Tour: Telling Stories at Stone Mountain

Stone Mountain is also part of a networked landscape of primary haunting. While not as dense with supposedly haunted places as other parts of Georgia, the Atlanta area has its share of ghosts. Oakland Cemetery, for example, is said to house a mass grave for over 3,000 Confederate soldiers, and, “[o]n some nights, people say, you can hear their names being whispered in the wind.” Many guests have booked a room at the Village Inn Bed & Breakfast,

in the city of Stone Mountain, because it's supposedly haunted by a "Rebel" who died there. Even ART Station's headquarters itself has been the scene of reported ghost sightings (Auchmutey 2004; see also Minn 2019). The owners of the Stillwell House inn, a former Confederate hospital, have spoken of multiple hauntings, saying that, "Some of them [the ghosts] need help, and some of them are just here to hang out" (Reddy 2016: np). Those in search of ghosts, then, can easily find them in or around Stone Mountain.

But with a few exceptions, like the claim of one Main Street shopkeeper in Buford to have seen two Black men hanging from the rafters in their shop (Auchmutey 2004), ghost stories told in and around the networks undergirding the dominant white public generally tell of Confederate soldiers or planters far more than they do of those they oppressed or fought to keep enslaved. Many of the area's primary hauntings thus seem filtered through an epistemology similar to what informs many white visitors' views of the plantation or carving just as many of the unquiet dead who linger around Atlanta come from the same romanticized South that haunts Stone Mountain.

This is not always the case. While many tourist plantations, ghost tours, and other historical sites in the South are largely silent on the matter, there are stories where Black ghosts and slavery are part of the presentation. Some tours acknowledge and dwell on slavery to add pathos and drama to their narratives, often for profit (cf. Miles 2015: 118). In Miles' experience, however, "much of the black history material that I encountered during my ghost-touring journey appeared to me as exoticized, romanticized, or decontextualized" (2015: 123). There are also counterpublics in which slavery or Black suffering are not used for entertainment purposes, such as Black heritage tours or public history efforts, but they are nowhere near as visible as the larger offerings that cater to white epistemologies of ignorance or those that present "safe" and distanced tours (cf. Miles 2015: 128–133; Ikegami 2000: 993, 1008–1011). Stone Mountain's *A Tour of Southern Ghosts* falls comfortably within the latter category.

As part of Georgia's haunting and ghost tour network, ART Station has welcomed around 10,000 visitors each year for nearly four decades to the Antebellum Plantation/Historic Square, for "A Tour of Southern Ghosts" on October weekends leading up to Halloween. The Tour consists of a lantern-lit stroll across six stations, each with a storyteller regaling visitors with "Southern ghost stories" set in a nebulous antebellum past (ART Station np; Staff 2023). In many ways, just as for Stone Mountain's plantation, keeping the stories situated in some mythical and unspecific yester-year seems to be crucial to the tour's success. Visitors might be told a tale about a man who twice fooled the Devil before finally trapping the Adversary in his coin purse for all eternity or one about menacing graveyard dogs. Many of these stories provide no contextualizing information whatsoever, although some are situated in a particular state or area. Rarely do they offer any clear dating (cf.

ART Station 2000).¹¹ Thus, visitors are neither weighed down by history lessons, nor forced to confront any hard truths about ancestors (cf. Miles 2015: 11). Rather than reminding visitors of a specific place and time, the Tour evokes nothing so much as the perfect Halloween outing. It's packaged as an experience, tied to Stone Mountain but also largely separated from it: the value comes from taking part (cf. O'Dell 2005: 13).

As such, the tour is largely free from the most pressing implications of both primary and secondary haunting. Indeed, some ads for the tour highlight its liminality. In the October 2019 issue of *Smoke Signal*, a local community newsletter, ART Station presented the 34th annual tour as being for “the young and old and for those who believe, those who don't, and for those who just want to have a good time” (ART Station 2019). The good-time focus is emphasized in the staging and the storytelling too. The storytellers are dressed in period(-ish) clothing and the tour is advertised to emphasize its family-friendly but spooky atmosphere (for examples, see *ART Station's 'A Tour of Southern Ghosts' Storytelling Festival 2009*; *'A Tour of Southern Ghosts' Commercial 2009*). The audio recordings are complemented with ambient sound effects and sounds meant to emphasize narrative elements, like growls or moans (ART Station 2000). Everything about the tour is calculated to entertain.

It's therefore unsurprising that slavery and white supremacy, although defining features of the time and place in which these stories are set, are almost entirely absent from the tour. Its few references to the Confederacy or slavery adhere to the patterns discussed above. For example, “I've Been Waiting for You,” a story that focuses on the murder of a Confederate soldier's wife by his jilted brother, is the most detailed about its setting. The audience is told that it takes place in Georgia, around November 23, 1864. The story contains celebratory references to the glory and valor of the Confederate dead and condemnatory language about Northern “punishment” of the South, Sherman's march to the sea, and “plundering Yankees,” but leaves the cause for secession and war unmentioned and unaddressed (ART Station, 2000: track 8).

Similarly, slavery is generally absent. The only recorded story to mention the topic, “Shadow,” begins by celebrating Mr. Hobbs as “the most kind-hearted plantation-owner you'd ever want to meet,” and adding that he treated “them folks living in his plantation as kinfolk” (ART Station 2000: track 10). After Hobbs died, however, his spoiled son – who was angered when his father bought a slave instead of buying him a horse – turns pleasant plantation life violent. The slaves revolt because the son is unkind, not because the institution of slavery and the treatment of human beings as property was

¹¹ “Patin's Pumpkin Patch” (track 2) is identified as taking place in Acadia Parish, Louisiana, and “Railroad Bill” (track 7) and “Little Cottage in the Wood” (track 9) are both identified as being set in Alabama. Few other recorded stories contain such information.

dehumanizing, leading to a story that in effect reduces a racist structure to a personal defect.

Miles notes that ghost tours are often thought of as escapism and voyeurism, and that because of this, even those that address the Civil War or slavery in more direct, and in more historically oriented ways, tend to mask the state-sponsored violence of war (2015: 9), or the socially sanctioned racism of slavery. This applies to this Tour as well, but it's not only the individual stories that promote or reward an epistemology of ignorance. The framing of the tour as an event and spectacle further contributes to this impression. In 2016, a local newsletter feature about the Tour claimed that it "celebrates the delightful southern tradition of telling incredible stories about ghosts, spirits, phantoms, specters, ghouls and other apparitions" (Anonymous 2016: 1). This framing suggests that ghost stories are a regional phenomenon, ignoring that there are multiple ghost story traditions in the South. Notably, each story in the Tour ends with the storyteller saying "Boo y'all!," encapsulating spookiness and Southernness within a single phrase. The fact that the phrase is trademarked (as seen above) even suggests an ownership claim to "Southern ghost stories" on ART Station's part.

As noted by Lawrence Levine, ghost stories and other folk and magical beliefs were used by enslaved Black people to teach their children about morality, and ghost stories could inspire comfort as well as fear, and even satisfaction, "in stories of dead slaves who returned to demand justice from the whites who had abused or killed them" (2007: 78–79). These weren't necessarily stories in the way the newsletter or much secondary hauntology suggest, as "[g]hosts [...] were *natural* phenomena and by no means invariably a source of fear" (2007: 79; emphasis in original). In a collection of "Southern Ghost Stories," Alan Brown notes that "it is a fact that southerners love to tell ghost stories," but quickly adds that the idea of "the South" is a problematic category at best. The region is diverse, and has been shaped by many groups and influences throughout its history (Brown 2000: xvff). For all their diverse influences, Brown adds that the Civil War is one of the primary elements that distinguishes Southern ghost stories from other parts of the USA. Another is the "sad legacy of slavery," although most stories featuring enslaved people don't condemn the practice. Rather, they might condemn miscegenation, characterize enslaved people as possessions, or present slave-masters in a positive light (2000: xxix–xxx).

This is a far cry from Black Georgians' talk about ghost stories in interviews with the Works Progress Administration during the 1930s, to cite one prominent example. "The stories they told about ghosts," Miles notes, "include a persistent theme: a view of spirits of the dead as powerful, potentially harmful entities to be both respected and feared" (2015: 126). One of the examples Miles discusses is "a terrifying story symbolizing the deadly profit-centered grind of slavery," that Emmaline Heard told about her mother's escape from a plantation. Her mother passed a cemetery and heard

a loud clanging sound of “wheels and chains” and saw a “big thing like a house,” that “looked like a lot of chains, wheels posts all mangled together.” The cause of the haunting, which Heard said was ongoing in her own day, “was because old Dave Copeland used to whip his slaves to death and bury them along there.” Here, slavery haunts the Georgia landscape in a direct, primary way – the ghost is neither whitewashed nor contented, but ominous and menacing. Stories like these emphasize the point that not every ghost story is frivolous or fun, and that some stories are told not to entertain but to remember, to warn, or to grieve those who were murdered in the name of white supremacy or profit.

A Tour of Southern Ghosts, then, like other ghost tours, is the product of choices. Choices about which unquiet dead to listen to and to empathize with; choices about which pasts to address and foreground, and which to forget. But these choices are invisible, presented as if the stories were the obvious candidates, and thus naturalized (cf. Barthes 2009). While this process is mostly implicit, the dehistoricized and dehistoricizing framing of the Tour is sometimes stated outright. In an advertisement for the Tour in an issue of *Smoke Signal*, for example, ART Station’s President and Artistic Director David Thomas says: “Along the lantern-lit paths of *one of the South’s most authentic – and spookiest! – plantations*, you’ll meet six professional storytellers (alternating nightly) who will share their ‘*real southern*’ ghost stories” (Anonymous 2016: 1; emphasis added).

As we’ve seen, the authenticity-claim is questionable at best (the plantation is a complete fabrication), and the claim to “real Southern” stories is flattening and generalizing. Most ghost-tour attendees aren’t after “real,” but positioning these types of ghost stories as “real” helps obfuscate the existence of other stories and traditions. Thomas’ framing suggests that “real” Southern ghost stories do not dwell on what plantations were or what caused the Civil War. How else could he approvingly tout the “authentic” plantation setting of the Tour? And it tells us, by extension, that “real” Southerners are either white or, if not, willing to accept white supremacy. Even the spookiness claim must be read in relation to the above as the Tour may be frightening to some, but it’s not challenging to white epistemologies. There is certainly no call for collective redress for slavery or white supremacy, and no attempt to prompt “moral action so that the living and dead can share a righteous space,” in relation to the enslaved dead (Lincoln and Lincoln 2015: 210). If anything, the Tour is likely to support such epistemologies, by feeding into well-established tropes of the Lost Cause, the Old South, the kind plantation owner, and the contented slave. A Tour of Southern Ghosts, the carving, and the plantation all point in the same direction, then: to the extent Stone Mountain is to be thought of as haunted, it is haunted not by the victims of slavery and white supremacy, but by their perpetrators, and they are calling out for justice against those who opposed them.

The Ghost in the Black Box

None of the above makes Stone Mountain, the carving, A Tour of Southern Ghosts, or the Boo Box unique. Myriad other plantations and Confederate monuments offer similar romantic and deracinated accounts of the antebellum South; ghost tours are a cultural staple in the South and in many other places, often offering similarly simplistic memory-fodder; and the Boo Box is a souvenir offered for fun and (charitable) profit, like those found at innumerable tourist destinations. However, the distinct interrelations between the souvenir and its negative spaces offer a distinct, contested and contestable, networking effect that supports the formation of certain publics and identities.

This network is predicated on forgetting. Stone Mountain Park was created in the mid-1900s to be a “landscape of recreation, amusement, and veneration of the Confederacy” (Brandt and Herrington 2022: 63), and remains so to this day. Its Confederate monument was made long after the end of the Civil War with planning beginning nearly half a century after war’s end and work on the carving not concluding until more than a century after the Confederacy’s fall. The carving was partially funded by the KKK and sanctioned by the state of Georgia as part of a perpetual memorial to the Confederacy. Regardless of its name-changes, the Historic Square plantation has always offered an anodyne, pastoral image of the South’s past that not only exudes a calculated inoffensiveness, but also a safe dehistoricization that elides any potentially disturbing aspects and comforts white visitors with the assurance that the Confederacy and slavery weren’t really all that bad. The Tour dramatizes this image to perhaps unsettle attendees – “Boo y’all!” – but also to comfort them (after all, ghosts aren’t real, right?). Ultimately, both separately and in the aggregate, these sites are social spaces that allow visitors to suspend their participation in a wider, more complex world, in favor of a simple worldview that can bolster memories that are otherwise contested and unsupported in everyday life. The Boo Box potentially makes that suspension portable, offering a charitable and fun, maybe even silly, and thus “apolitical” symbolic reminder.

Everything we’ve discussed above can be regarded as fantastic. Ghost stories build on a consensual fiction of belief. Like many tourist plantations, Stone Mountain Park is shot through with claims to authenticity about a fabricated plantation not much more than half a century old. And much of the park’s well-documented history, including the KKK’s involvement and the recent vintage of its memory sites, is largely effaced from the space and from marketing. Visitors must buy into every aspect of this fabrication – Stone Mountain’s continued charm and allure rest on this dialectic. This dialectic is political: Stone Mountain is haunted, explicitly and romantically, by the Old South and the Lost Cause, and implicitly - and for some traumatically - by slavery and white supremacy. These hauntings and histories are mutually exclusive. Like choosing whether or not to open the Boo Box, a visitor must choose between awe and wonder at the imposing and impressive sights

providing a pleasant memory-fantasy, or the mundane, but troubling, history they obscure, and thus give up the fantastic. This stark choice is succinctly summarized in the above-quoted *Condé Nast Traveler* article:

If you're offended by the South's Confederate history, you may want to steer clear. The world's largest bas-relief carving on the mountain depicts three Confederate generals. However, those who want to get their blood pumping with an outdoor workout, history buffs, and parents who need their kids to expend some energy will love it here. (Bradley Franklin nd)

The price of enjoyment and family fun at Stone Mountain, it seems, is forgetting.

Forgetting at Stone Mountain can be viewed as socially formative. It produces certain images of the past – certain imagined worlds, certain memories – that, while fantastic, aren't only fantasy. They can also lead to social practices with real social consequences. Stone Mountain is not the only place that promotes this type of rhetoric, but it can contribute to opposition towards reckonings with the South's past and to belligerent claims that veneration of the Confederacy is about "heritage not hate." This view of the Southern past has been so widely and successfully sold that some – perhaps unaware of the irony – even regard questioning it to be anti-historical. "Confederate flags and monuments are in dispute in several states of the former Confederacy," writes Hunt: "those who want them removed consider them present-day symbols of white supremacy, while those who oppose their ejection cast such efforts as a wilful erasure of history" (Hunt 2018: 7).

And this is where the answer to our question above emerges: When is a ghost not a ghost? Certainly when it's in a box sold as a souvenir at Stone Mountain, a place where the UDC, the resurgent KKK, massive resistance, and political as well as epistemic white supremacy have calcified into a set of firm conditions for white-racialized, anti-historical identity formation. At the same time, critics of Stone Mountain Park and its memory sites – as well as of Confederate monuments in general – are chipping away at the positive "historical" models they offer to some. By suspending everyday political complexity, the presentation of the plantation, the carving, and the ghost tour offer a way of depoliticizing a deeply political space so that Stone Mountain's antebellum and Civil War-era South can be presented as a place without politics that instead overflows with leisure, honor, and wonder. The theme park atmosphere permeating Stone Mountain commodifies forgetting in order to sell white supremacy. Which is why our empty box makes no reference to the space at all, so as not to accidentally give the game away.

As a souvenir, a keepsake and reminder of the visit to Stone Mountain and participation in *A Tour of Southern Ghosts*, the Boo Box reduces and obfuscates the fact that Stone Mountain was built on a foundation of 20th century white supremacy. Moreover, it encourages consent to the fantasy of a benign, homogenous antebellum South and acts as a means to uphold and

remember this image of the past that permeates the place and spectacle. If it's ever opened, the Boo Box risks becoming just another cardboard box. While closed, it remains not only a commodity, but a memento that allows for perpetual dwelling on the fantastic – a way to avoid looking at the very negative space to which the box owes its existence and reason for being. That is, it bears silent witness to how a dialectic of meaning-making afforded by the fantastic can produce modes of memory and forgetting and support politicized forms of cultural production and identity formation. Either way, its value lies entirely on the surface. In begging for our attention it becomes another distraction from Stone Mountain. To look any deeper than that would necessitate looking beyond the object itself and would embarrass those selling it. But make no mistake: while there is no ghost, the box is haunted.

BOO Y'ALL!TM

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