Monumental Change: Recontextualization and Inclusion Through the Lens of Denver’s Civil War Monument and the Sand Creek Massacre

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Abstract
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Monumental Change: Recontextualization and Inclusion Through the Lens of Denver’s Civil War Monument and the Sand Creek Massacre

A Thesis

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Master of Arts

by

Sarah Davidson

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Advisor: Dr. Christina Kreps
Abstract

In recent years, countries in the Global North have begun to grapple with the origins of long-standing monuments and their implication about society’s present values. This project is a case study of the Denver Civil War Monument, a monument erected in 1909 to honor soldiers from Colorado who fought during the years spanning the American Civil War. A plaque on the monument which lists the Battles and Engagements includes Sand Creek. The Sand Creek Massacre was an attack on a peaceful village of Cheyenne and Arapaho by Colorado’s 3rd Regiment that resulted in the murder and mutilation of hundreds of members of the tribes. This thesis examines the impact of past and current efforts to recontextualize the monument and its plaque. It also focuses on how the memory of Sand Creek and the heritage built around it influences the way it is memorialized and recontextualized. Additionally, this project analyzes the successes and failures of the recontextualization efforts of other monuments born from dark historical events. By including a more diverse group of voices for these projects, focusing on restorative justice, and creating awareness about the consequences when governments try to ignore or delay needed changes, future monument recontextualization projects will be better situated for success.
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Chapter One Introduction

No single statement can be seen without the whole, nor can it be removed without destroying the diversity of...voices. Silencing every voice with which we disagree...either through ignorance or malice, is profoundly un-American.- Judy Baca, 2005 (as cited in Doss 2010, 376).

Many statues, memorials, and monuments dot the American landscape, each with an intricate backstory and message. Oftentimes, much of this backstory is unknown to the general public. These forms of public art are often inherently celebratory but do not necessarily represent contemporary community values and ideals of America as a whole. A boom in memorialization referred to as “statue mania” by Erika Doss occurred in the years following the American Civil War and into the twentieth century. According to Doss, an American Studies scholar, a critical review of these memorializations in the twenty-first century reveals underlying metanarratives, such as manifest destiny, Anglo-Saxon dominance, and American exceptionalism (Doss 2010, 20).

To counteract these metanarratives, some activists, community groups, and custodians of these monuments are engaging in what many scholars and others often refer to today as “monument recontextualization.” As societal values change and more marginalized voices are being heard, attempts to rename, completely remove, or add historical context to controversial monuments are increasing. Those who advocate for
these alterations typically do so because the beliefs and principles behind and encoded in
the pieces are ostensibly outdated and/or present a distinct historical perspective that
erases other concurrent histories.

In recent years, numerous cities have begun removing statues glorifying
Confederate heroes and monuments honoring fallen Confederate soldiers, for example.
Journalists have been reporting on these instances and sharing their reports through print
and social media, presenting the views of parties on various sides of the controversy. The
Washington Post, among other news sources, has been reporting on these events as they
happen with each fading from public consciousness quickly. The issue of monument
recontextualization drew little attention from the general public across the country
initially, and it seemed many were content to defer to city and state governments to
choose what to do with the monuments under their care.

However, a considerable amount of societal friction was growing under the
surface. Feelings of anger were most prevalent among White Americans who felt that
protests monuments of Confederate idols or monuments memorializing core ideals of the
Confederate States of America, were an effort to erase portions of American history that
they considered to be essential to their heritage. In February 2017, the Charlottesville
City Council voted to remove a statue of Robert E. Lee, a general with the Confederate
Army of Northern Virginia, from a city park (Shepherd 2017). This case would cause the
quiet outrage of some to boil over, turning debate and controversy into violence.
The controversies surrounding monuments, especially within the context of other concurrent sociopolitical movements, caused a backlash leading to a myriad of protests. The first of these to command national attention was the Unite the Right rally in Charlottesville, Virginia in August 2017 that took place in response to the Charlottesville City Council vote. It was led by Richard Spencer, who has been described as “a leader of far-right White nationalists” (Heim 2017). Groups attending the rally included neo-Confederates, Ku Klux Klansmen, White nationalists, and White supremacists.

Approximately one hundred individuals from these groups led a march the night before the rally. The protesters chanted anti-Semitic phrases as they walked with tiki torches through the city’s University of Virginia campus. They encountered counter-protesters and an altercation took place. As pepper spray filled the air and protesters swung their torches, Charlottesville police broke up the fight.

The next morning protesters and counter-protesters converged on Emancipation Park, the site of the Robert E. Lee statue at the center of the controversy. Long before the rally’s scheduled start time of noon, violence from the previous evening rekindled.

According to Heim’s Washington Post article of the event:

Rallygoers arrived in contingents, waving nationalist banners and chanting slogans. Many carried shields and clubs. A large number also carried pistols or long guns. Counterprotesters had also gathered early. Members of anti-fascist groups yelled at the rallygoers. Many of them also carried sticks and shields. They were joined by local residents, members of church groups, civil rights leaders and onlookers. (Heim 2017)

The growing tension between protesters and counter-protesters demonstrated a need for police intervention. Heim reported in The Washington Post that “by 10:30 a.m., there had
been a few small skirmishes, but the fury was building, and it became obvious that a brawl would be stopped only if police stepped in. They did not” (Heim 2017). Shortly after 11:00 A.M., the city of Charlottesville declared a state of emergency, and the crowd was designated as an unlawful assembly. A few hours later, a man drove his car into a crowd of counter-protesters killing one woman and injuring nineteen others. In total, approximately thirty-eight were injured and three people died, two of whom were state troopers whose helicopter crashed on the way to the scene.

Most of the violence in Charlottesville was over within twenty-four hours, but the event, with individuals carrying Nazi flags and armed militia groups in plain sight, was a turning point in public perception that these once outdated and ineffective groups saw themselves as newly empowered. There was also now a connection between these growing movements with those who did not support monument recontextualization. Monuments to the Confederacy became linked with the images of torches and swastikas from Charlottesville in the minds of numerous Americans. To avoid similar protests in their towns and campuses, legislators and officials from various universities and cities began to remove their Confederate monuments. Some were done secretly overnight as an additional measure to avoid clashes with protesters. This was the situation in Baltimore, Maryland. As described in a New York Times article, there was, no immediate public notice, no fund-raising, and no plan for a permanent location for the monuments once they had been excised...But...[Mayor Catherine] Pugh suggested the tense political climate had turned her city’s statues into a security threat and she said that her emergency powers allowed her to have them removed immediately. ‘The mayor has the right to protect her city,’ she said. ‘For me, the statues represented pain, and not only did I want to protect my city from any more
of that pain, I also wanted to protect my city from any of the violence that was occurring around the nation. We don’t need that in Baltimore. (Fandos et al. 2017)

Despite these quick decisions by those in charge, the debate continued with the public across the country.

Resistance to removal or recontextualization comes from those who believe monuments should be left intact to save history, despite their controversy. In March of 2017, a bill passed in the Alabama Senate prohibiting changes to monuments that have stood longer than twenty years. This bill followed a vote in 2015 to relocate a Confederate statue in Birmingham, the attempted removal of which was blocked by lawsuits. Tennessee and North Carolina have similar laws, which prevent the removal or alteration of Confederate memorials (Izaguirre 2017). These cases are becoming more frequent, likely due to the strengthening of civil rights movements, such as Black Lives Matter (Zuckerman 2015). Many individuals newly participating in advocacy and allyship, particularly monument recontextualization cases, would benefit from a retrospective of similar instances. Knowing what has or has not succeeded in the past may create a more efficient movement advocating for collaboration and inclusion in the present.
This thesis focuses on the case of the Civil War monument that stood before the western entrance to the Colorado State Capitol in Denver from July 1909 to June 2020 and the impact of memory on this timeline of events. I analyze other cases involving the handling of monuments that represent painful past events and symbols of difficult heritage. I consider the controversy that arose over twenty years ago around concerns about the original plaque on the Denver Civil War Monument, which included Sand Creek, Colorado in a list of battles and engagements fought by Colorado soldiers during the Civil War. Soldiers from Colorado fought for both the Union and the Confederacy,
but the events at Sand Creek were perpetrated by some of Colorado's Union forces.

Modern interpretations of the November 1864 attack at Sand Creek refer to it as a massacre, not a battle, in which Cheyenne and Arapaho people were slaughtered and their bodies mutilated (National Park Service 2017).

Colorado lawmakers and activists began to scrutinize the plaque’s wording in the late 1990s. Those who desired changes to the plaque argued that, by listing Sand Creek on the Civil War Monument as a massacre, it glorified the massacre of hundreds of people as well as glorifying those responsible for it. The first effort was to erase the words “Sand Creek” from the monument. However, members of the public, led by Indigenous American activists, had a different idea. They began to push to provide additional contextual elements. In 1999, in response to requests by Sand Creek descendants and other activists, a plaque condemning the massacre, describing the tribes attacked as peaceful, and addressing the struggle of Colorado residents to accept responsibility for these actions was placed flat on top of a retaining wall around the monument. The plaque was not immediately visible and could easily have gone unnoticed by those who passed by the Civil War Monument, which towered above the plaque’s placement.

I became interested in this topic after visiting Downtown Denver and seeing the recontextualization plaque next to the Civil War Monument. I lived in South Carolina for a time while completing my undergraduate work and have encountered individuals who exemplified the mindset of those fighting against recontextualization. When I first visited the Civil War Monument in Denver I was impressed when I saw the plaque, which
seemed to me to be an example of the dominant culture confronting and taking responsibility for mistakes made in the past. As I began to research the monument’s history it became increasingly complex and interesting to me. I knew the story behind this additional context from the twentieth century has value for the narrative of more recent controversies.

Through the years, before and after the plaque was added, the monument stood at the center of the countless ceremonies, celebrations, and protests held on the steps of the Colorado Capitol. But in the late 2010s, as a focus on monuments became intertwined with the Black Lives Matter movement, those protests turned their focus on the Denver Civil War Monument, among others. When I started this project in the Spring of 2017, there seemed to only be murmurings about monuments whose subject matter was being criticized for roots in racism or other forms of historical erasure. Less than half a year later, the Alt-Right protest of the removal of a monument to Robert E. Lee in Charlottesville, Virginia took place, bringing the issue of monuments to the fore. Since then, protests have bubbled up and receded again and again. As I was working on this project through the Summer of 2020, months-long protests were held globally against systemic racism and police brutality, sparked by the murder of George Floyd, a Black man in Minneapolis, Minnesota, at the hands of police officers.
Protests continued for over a month across the US as well as in Denver. But unlike in Minneapolis, the damage caused in Denver and particularly at the capitol and surrounding buildings by protestors was relatively minor, consisting mostly of spray-painted graffiti and a few broken windows. Nearly a month after the protests began, under the cover of night, unknown individuals toppled the figure atop the stone pedestal of the Denver Civil War Monument. This pivotal moment in the middle of my research made it even more urgent and compelling.

Monuments to slave traders and owners, colonizers, Confederates, members of the Ku Klux Klan, and other racist figures all over the world were criticized, defaced, pulled down, and even thrown into bodies of water by protestors in 2020. These acts have come after years of the public pleading with those in power to remove these symbols of
racism, oppression, and violence. Though it is difficult to reflect on these events while they are still happening, it seems to validate an argument I make in this thesis: if calls for monument recontextualization and removal are repeatedly ignored, the public will take it into their own hands. This could result in damage to the monument or surrounding structures, like concrete walls or walkways, as well as potentially cause injury. If restorative justice is not a motivator for some, the fiscal aspect could be more persuasive.

The Black Lives Matter protests in the summer of 2020 took place in cities across the United States. Three cities where protests incurred a high cost were Richmond, Virginia, Raleigh, North Carolina, and Minneapolis, Minnesota. The city of Richmond spent $1.5 million on police overtime; protest-related fires cost the city $2.9 million (WFXR Fox 2020, Fultz 2020). In Raleigh, protestors pulled down two bronze confederate statues, hanging one by the neck from a streetlight and pulling the other through the streets to the courthouse (Henderson 2020). This resulted in the city taking down two other targeted monuments the morning after. The cost for Raleigh in policing alone for 14 days, from May 30th to June 12th, 2020 amounted to $164,300 (Dillon 2020). These cities had notably been opposed to removing or recontextualizing their Confederate monuments. For comparison, in the epicenter of the protests in Minneapolis, damages came to $3 million, and in its sister city, Saint Paul, protestors pulled down a statue of Christopher Columbus (Salta 2020, Taylor 2020). All three cities reported hundreds of arrests. The monetary cost resulting from protests might have been mitigated if officials were more responsive to the public, including calls for monument recontextualization.
In 2015, Baltimore’s protests in the wake of Freddie Gray’s murder at the hands of Baltimore police resulted in protests where “235 people were arrested, 20 officers were injured, and nearly 300 businesses were damaged, with about a dozen burned” (Anderson 2020). But during the Black Lives Matter protests during the summer of 2020, the city fared much better compared to others. Baltimore “emerged as an oasis of relative calm, even with only minor damage and a handful of arrests” (Cassie 2020). News sources speculate that this success was because of lessons learned from its experiences during the Freddie Gray protests. Baltimore had been proactive about removing Confederate monuments after the events at Charlottesville in 2017. This proactive approach may have lessened Baltimore’s troubles compared to other cities' experiences in 2020. As these events continue to occur, it becomes more apparent that removal and preservation of a monument in an appropriate setting, such as a museum, by custodians of contested monuments is safer, less costly, and is significantly less likely to cause damage. It is also a step toward protecting communities by keeping these protests from turning violent.
Denver’s Civil War Monument is a real-world example of one possible solution for controversial monuments. The contextual plaque was added nearly twenty years before the events in Charlottesville, Virginia, so it had a long enough timeline to show trends or repercussions of the plaque. Additionally, the plaque was an instance of a government honoring a request by a group that is not only marginalized but also Indigenous. It was legislation that was progressive for its time. However, we now know that the plaque was merely a stopgap in dealing with outdated public iconography in our midst. Due to continuing efforts to accurately tell the story of Sand Creek on the grounds of the Colorado State Capitol, the story of this monument can illustrate how, while being ahead of its time, the initial effort falls short of committing to restorative justice for the tribes. To achieve this and make things right, many argue that more should still be done to show remorse for past actions and to properly memorialize those lost in the massacre.
**Chapter Summaries**

Chapter Two covers the historical background of Denver’s Civil War Monument. I examine the social and political movements that pushed Coloradans to build the monument in the first place. This historical background is critical to understanding the events and circumstances that eventually led to the recontextualization and relocation of the monument. I recount the beginnings of White settlement in the Colorado territory, anti-Indigenous public sentiment, and government legislation, which contributed to creating an atmosphere that made the Sand Creek Massacre possible in 1864.

Chapter Three covers the literature, theoretical concepts, and frameworks used in this research, such as the anthropology of heritage as it relates to monuments and memorials and an overview of the anthropology of memory. This chapter also includes an explanation of restorative justice, how the concept has been used, and how it is applicable to this project. The scholarship of Laurajane Smith, Maurice Halbwachs, and Pierre Nora, is especially helpful in understanding how and why humans memorialize and remember. The recent literature on monuments and memorials has been essential for contextualizing my case study within larger global and historical contexts. These works review patterns of memorialization that have occurred in the United States over the last century and a half. Arjun Appadurai’s concept of the “social life of things” as well as Igor Kopytoff’s “cultural biography of things” are also key theoretical concepts that inform the study.

Chapter Four outlines my research design and methods, including my research goals. The first of which was to determine the ways memory affects memorialization, which can pinpoint the reasons the monument exists and how care can be taken in
establishing future monuments or recontextualizing current monuments. The second goal of this research was to examine the trials and triumphs of the process of monument reinterpretation at other sites to be more inclusive of multiple voices and perspectives. My final goal was the analysis of the valuable differentiators that exist in the case of the Denver Civil War Monument and its journey to discover what it, specifically, can teach us. These goals provided essential information to gain a better understanding of the monument recontextualization process, and the strengths of advocating for the involvement of marginalized groups in that process. Details on methods for gathering that information are also recounted, as well as my limitations and positionality.

Findings and analysis are also presented in Chapter Four. I consider the link between memory and memorialization. I selected a few monuments, which also represent aspects of difficult heritage and have been updated. These monuments are the Memorial Marker for Emmett Till in Mississippi, the statue of Juan de Oñate in New Mexico, and the National Memorial for Peace and Justice in Alabama. I also present and analyze data from two informal surveys taken at History Colorado Center (HCC), a museum focused on general Colorado history, located in downtown Denver, just two blocks from the Denver Civil War monument. The first survey was taken in the Fall of 2017, right after the events in Charlottesville, Virginia. The second was taken after the Denver Civil War Monument was pulled down by protestors and put on exhibit there. Findings and discussion are written concurrently using the knowledge listed in this chapter and the theories presented in chapter three; data points will be connected to conclusions.
Chapter Five, the conclusion, reflects on my research. It shows how important it is for marginalized stakeholders to be involved in the process of recontextualization and summarizes the essential nature of collaboration. If prioritizing these voices for the sake of restorative justice is not enough for some, the prospect of diffusing future protests and reducing the cost of clean-up and policing may be more persuasive. The conclusion ends with an Indigenous voice, author, and documentarian, Cinnamon Kills First, giving her perspective of the work White communities must do.
Chapter Two Background

On the importance of history and reflection, the former President of the Missouri Historical Society, Robert Archibald, writes,

So there is a point to history, for history is a process of facilitating conversations in which we consider what we have done well, what we have done poorly, and how we can do better, conversations that are a prelude to action (Archibald 1999, 24-25).

Before examining the constantly evolving way the Sand Creek Massacre has been remembered and memorialized, it is important to reflect on the historical events as well as the factors and perspectives that influenced its journey. Archibald calls on us to look critically at the way monuments and memorials deal with people, places, and concepts surrounding them. Background information like this is essential when considering what to do with controversial monuments such as Denver’s Civil War monument.

From the very beginning, westward expansion disrupted tribal movement and hunting for the Indigenous populations of Colorado, made up mostly of Cheyenne, Arapaho, and Utes at the time of European settlement. A relatively small number of people moved to the territory at first, mostly migrating from the Midwest and mid-Atlantic states. Most White settlers were passing through on their way to California to
find their fortune during the years of the California Gold Rush, beginning in 1849. Before
the Colorado Gold Rush in 1858, very few permanent settlements were established in the
Colorado territory, aside from those associated with the Spanish. “Non-Native settlement
in Colorado remained limited to fewer than a thousand persons-- Indian traders,
merchants, and soldiers in posts established to protect travelers, including Fort Wise, later
Fort Lyon” (Smith et al. 2014, 39). Resources, such as grazing grasses for livestock and
bison, began to be depleted. But those migrating west were on a path that led to the
disruption and detrimental impacts on the life and culture for the Plains Tribes once gold
was discovered in the Colorado Territory. Colorado’s Gold Rush brought twice as many
settlers as the California Gold Rush. As noted by Smith et al. (2014),

Settlement that had been scattered and temporary now was permanent and
widespread. In contrast to earlier arrivals like William Bent [of Bent’s Fort], the
newcomers sought not to blend with indigenous people but to create a society,
economy, and political structure modeled on the East. In the past, this kind of
development nearly always had proved incompatible with the Indians’ way of life
and repeatedly led to their removal. Colorado proved no exception (p. 39).

In December of that year, William Bent, a long-time trader at a fur trading post on the
Santa Fe trail in southeastern Colorado called Bent’s Fort, wrote that the tribes he had
been living alongside peacefully for decades were “very uneasy and restless… This is
their Principal Hunting Grounds. This movement they do not understand as they have
never been treated [negotiated with] for it” (quoted in Smith et al. 2014, 41). The
Indigenous people in the area were pressed into smaller and smaller areas of land, which
created a shortage of food. Bent predicted this would lead to war over food resources and
that the local Indigenous people would, regrettably, lose the fight.
By 1860, at least thirty-five thousand non-Indigenous people lived in Colorado. The next year Colorado officially became a territory. President Abraham Lincoln appointed William Gilpin territorial governor and ex-officio Superintendent of Indian Affairs. Under Governor Gilpin in 1861, the United States government and ten chiefs from the Southern Cheyenne and Southern Arapaho entered the Treaty of Fort Wise, which significantly reduced the size of the Cheyenne-Arapaho land reserve. However, the legitimacy of this document was hotly contested for a few reasons. One debated issue was that the treaty was signed by only a few chiefs and not agreed on by whole tribes. Another point of criticism is that those representing the United States provided a questionable level of language interpretation for both the Cheyenne and Arapaho chiefs in attendance, meaning the level of understanding they had about what they were agreeing to was debatable. So, while the Colorado Territorial government seemed to be diplomatic and fair in its dealings with the tribes, the integrity of that process was controversial.

The following year, in 1862 John Evans was appointed territorial governor and ex-officio Superintendent of Indian Affairs. Evans was a Midwestern man who founded Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois, a town named for him. He had political ambition and hoped to help Colorado gain statehood and make Denver a railroad hub for the West.

Colonel John M. Chivington was another pivotal figure in territorial Colorado and the Sand Creek Massacre. Also known as the “Fighting Parson,” he, …arrived in Denver in 1860 as the presiding elder of the Methodist Episcopal Church for the Rocky Mountain District. Draped in lion skins and with Colt
revolvers strapped to his waist, he quickly gained a reputation, even among frontier toughs, for his peculiar brand of “muscular Christianity” (Halaas 2004, 120).

Chivington also received notoriety for his success in the Union Army’s conflicts in the New Mexico battles of the Civil War, specifically the Battle of Glorieta Pass. Chivington and Evans were of one mind when it came to several issues, like Colorado statehood and relations with the tribes living in the territory. Chivington also harbored political ambitions and expectations for further military exploits (Utley 2003, 87). As the number of people moving to the plains from the East increased, the presence of the tribes stood in the way of the goals of these two men.

Living in different ways and in such proximity, relations between Indigenous Americans and the White settlers became increasingly tense as each group became more distrustful of the other. In the summer of 1864, a rancher named Nathan Ward Hungate, his wife, and two daughters, a four-year-old and an infant, were found dead near their home thirty miles southeast of Denver. “Because the corpses had been scalped and mutilated, the onlookers assumed that Native people were responsible for the murders” (Kelman 2013, 147). The bodies were taken to Denver and displayed for all to see. According to historian Ari Kelman, this was ostensibly a memorial for the family, but it fanned the flames of White settlers’ distrust of Indigenous American’s into an all-out panic. This effect of the Hungate Murders seemed to be known even at the time. The Sand Creek Massacre Report, published a year later, reads,

The hatred of whites to the Indians would seem to have been inflamed and excited to the utmost; the bodies...were brought to the capital of the Territory and exposed to the public gaze for the purpose of inflaming still more the already excited feeling of the people (The Joint Committee on the Conduct of War 1865, IV).
With these lines, the U.S. government acknowledged the calculation and manipulation of the Hungate Family’s memory and the subsequent effect on the White population in Colorado.

There were many attacks on settlers and their property that summer for which the Cheyenne were wrongly blamed. Evans and Chivington, among others, feared that the tribes might unite to fight the White settlers, despite long-standing and persistent conflict between different tribes and bands. Evans and Chivington spoke publicly about what was widely called the “Indian Problem.” The negative perspectives and fearmongering they aroused are said to have created a kind of hysteria throughout the territory. In the end, fears about a coalition of tribes forming were exaggerated. In the words of American author and historian Robert M. Utley,

> No alliance of tribes materialized, although as usual, the spring grasses stirred youthful energies, and stock herds and other White property suffered. To these offenses, real and imagined, Chivington’s soldiers responded with heavy-handed violence. “Burn villages and kill Cheyennes whenever and wherever found,” ordered one of his field officers (Utley 2003, 88).

With growing violence between Indigenous American and White communities and the Civil War raging, there were fears that the tribes would side with the Confederacy. In hopes of allying them with the Union, President Abraham Lincoln invited several tribal leaders to Washington D.C. One of these leaders was a Cheyenne peace chief named Lean Bear. Despite Lincoln’s motives for calling the meeting, Lean Bear arrived determined to ask the president to stop the violence being perpetrated against his people by the United States army and local governments. Lincoln responded with a level of ethnocentrism typical of American Presidents, “Although we are now engaged in a great
war between one another, we are not, as a race, so much disposed to fight and kill one another as our red brethren” (Malcomson 2000, 94). He also encouraged the delegation of chiefs to give up their nomadic hunter-gatherer lifestyle and align their ways more closely with Whites saying, “I can only say that I can see no way in which your race is to become as numerous and prosperous as the white race except by living as they do.” (Malcomson 2000, 95) By the conclusion of the meeting, Lean Bear received one of the peace medals Lincoln offered to chiefs willing to promise not to join forces with the Confederacy. With this Presidential acknowledgment, Lean Bear’s tribe began to consider the chief “a big friend of the whites” (Moore 2014).

In May of 1864, less than fifteen months after meeting with Lincoln and committing to peace with the United States, the First Colorado Cavalry came upon Lean Bear’s camp near Ash Creek, Kansas. Having full confidence in his relationship with the Whites, Lean Bear rode out alone to greet them wearing his peace medal and clutching a letter from Abraham Lincoln, which declared him to be peaceful and friendly. Before Lean Bear could reach the soldiers, he was shot off his horse and then shot multiple times on the ground as the soldiers rode past him. These men were likely acting on orders from Colonel Chivington to open fire on any Indigenous people they encountered and not to bother taking any prisoners (Halaas 2004, 131). The soldiers then, opened fire with howitzers. The Indians returned the fire for a time until Black Kettle [a Cheyenne chief and peacemaker] rode up. ‘He told us we must not fight with the white people,’ recalled one, ‘so we stopped.’ The soldiers retreated; twenty-eight Indians lay dead (Utley 2003, 89).

This event gave rise to the famous Dog Soldiers, led by Lean Bear’s brother, Bull Bear. These young warriors were angered by the violence they experienced at the hands
of the Whites and refused to engage in more futile attempts to negotiate peace (Hoig 1990, 12). They began attacks on the lives and property of the settlers. Ultimately, their efforts lent credence to the stereotypes that Indigenous Americans had a tendency toward violence that could not be curtailed by peace chiefs like Black Kettle.

Federal and territorial leadership continued to make decisions that created an atmosphere of anti-Indigenous American sentiment in the territory. Due to the fear, which culminated in the wake of the Hungate alleged murders, John Evans issued two proclamations, both commonly cited by historians when talking about the Governor. According to historians, at best the proclamations were unclear regarding the directives for the public in their interactions with the surrounding tribes. At worst, Evans was openly encouraging hostilities toward Indigenous Americans.

The first proclamation, dated June 27, 1864, advised all who encountered “friendly indians” to inform them of depredations committed by some Indigenous Americans against the property and lives of Whites. Additionally, the proclamation gave instructions for those bands who wanted to show themselves to be peaceable in return for supplies and protection.

Friendly Arapahoe’s and Cheyenne’s belonging on the Arkansas River will go to Major Colby, United States Indian Agent, at Fort Lyon, who will give them provisions, and show them a place of safety...The object of this is to prevent friendly Indians from being killed through mistake; none but those who intend to be friendly with the whites must come to these places. The families of those who have gone to war with the whites must be kept away from among friendly Indians. The war on hostile Indians will be continued until they are effectually subdued (quoted in Clemmer-Smith et al. 2014, 60).

To convey this message to the tribes, “Evans had sent out messengers, but aside from contact with the Arapaho leader, Roman Nose, Friday, and a few other of the deemed
‘friendly Indians,’ he made little effort to induce others to come in” (Clemmer-Smith et al. 2014, 63).

Evans’s proclamation may have appeared to be a kind, generous, and legitimate attempt at peace, but certain factors made it ineffective. First, John Evans did not know where most bands resided because they were nomadic (Clemmer-Smith et al. 2014, 79). This ignorance coupled with the distance required for the news to travel resulted in most of the tribes being unaware of the proclamation’s offer until mid-July. By then, the U.S. Military and Indigenous Americans were already bound for war. Second, Colorado did not have the funds to provide the promised provisions to the tribes. This was an ineffectual attempt to protect and provide for “friendly” members of the tribes and justified more violence against any tribe who resided in Colorado.

The proclamation that followed, dated August 11, 1864, had no specified audience. It opened with a summary of the earlier proclamation. Evans stated that very few tribes had accepted his generous offer of safety and provisions in the forty-five days since issuing the first proclamation. The proclamation assumed that any bands remaining on the plains were hostile, likely Dog Soldiers, and the governor permitted civilians to fight against them. Evans proclaimed:

...I, John Evans, governor of Colorado Territory, do issue this my proclamation, authorizing all citizens of Colorado, either individually or in such parties as they might organize, to go in pursuit of all hostile Indians on the plains, scrupulously avoiding those who have responded to my said call to rendezvous at the points indicated; also, to kill and destroy, as enemies of the country, wherever they may be found, all such hostile Indians. (as quoted in Clemmer-Smith et al. 2014, 64)

Evans's proclamation offered settlers a reward for taking up arms for this cause in the form of any property they could “recover” from these expeditions. He closes by saying,
“The conflict is upon us, and all good citizens are called upon to do their duty for the defense of their homes and families.” It is possible to interpret these words as an implication that anyone who does not work to fulfill these imperatives is not a good citizen and is, perhaps, an enemy of the country. Such enemies, according to this proclamation, should be destroyed. Going out to fight “hostile Indians,” as John Evans called them, was perceived as a citizen’s duty which proved one’s loyalty to the United States. However, Evans’s proclamation did not provide a way for those “good citizens” to identify who was “friendly” and who was “hostile” if they were outside of the specified rendezvous points. The second proclamation gave the impression of confidence that no band outside of safe zones around the designated forts, Fort Lyon, Fort Larned, and Fort Laramie, could be friendly or just ignorant of the proclamation. Evan’s efforts to ensure the tribes received the message were dubious at best. It is unlikely that, in the forty-five-day period between proclamations, Evans would be sure all the relevant parties had been made aware of the information in the first proclamation and had arrived safely at one of the specified forts.

After that summer, John Evans held a conference at Camp Weld on September 28, 1864, with Cheyenne and Arapaho leaders. At this conference, Black Kettle gave an impassioned speech in favor of peace. He said:

We want to hold you by the hand. You are our father… The sky has been dark ever since the war began. These braves who are with me are willing to do what I say. We want to take good tidings home to our people, that they may sleep in peace. I want you to give all these chiefs of the soldiers here to understand that we are for peace, and that we have made peace, that we may not be mistaken by them for enemies. I have not come here with a little wolf bark but have come to talk plain with you. We must live near the buffalo or starve. When we came here, we came free, without any apprehension, to see you, and when I go home and tell my
people that I have taken your hand, and the hands of all the chiefs here in Denver, they will feel well, and so will all the different tribes of Indians on the plains after we have eaten and drank with them (Smith et al. 2014, 70-71)

Black Kettle’s plea is tragic, especially when looking back at this conference with the knowledge that in just over sixty days the brutal actions of the U.S. Military at the Sand Creek Massacre would unfold.

Even after Black Kettle’s words and the Cheyenne and Arapaho’s surrender at Fort Lyon, as Evans had instructed, the Governor still believed the raids committed in August meant the tribes wanted to pursue war with the settlers. To supplement Colorado’s military forces, Evans was permitted to raise Colorado’s Third Cavalry, a one-hundred-day regiment specifically tasked with guarding against the threat Evans had said the tribes presented. To maintain his own credibility, Evans declined to make a treaty with the Cheyenne and Arapaho out of fear it might embarrass the military operations against the Plains Tribes (Smith et al. 2014, 72). Evans could only hold another peace council with the tribes once the military had a victory.

Colonel John Chivington led the outfit and was eager to respond to raids and violence allegedly committed by the tribes in the territory, as well as to make a name for himself. He often publicly expressed his anti-Indigenous American views. In a public speech he made in Denver he advocated “the killing and scalping of all Indians, even infants, saying “Nits make lice!” (Brown 1970, 89). Chivington’s unit saw no significant action for most of their one hundred days, however, and was mocked, being called “the bloodless third”. Seemingly to prove themselves, Chivington and his men went out looking for a fight.
In his witness testimony at the subsequent trial, John S. Smith stated that he believed Chivington knew the bands at Sand Creek were friendly because he stopped mail service and travelers on the road from going ahead of his soldiers. Upon his arrival, he posted guards around Bent’s Fort and Fort Lyon to ensure that no one might leave and warn the Cheyenne and Arapaho of the coming attack (The Joint Committee on the Conduct of War 1865, 7). In the officer’s quarters,

Major Anthony greeted him warmly. Chivington began talking of ‘collecting scalps’ and ‘wading in gore.’ Anthony responded by saying that he had been ‘waiting for a good chance to pitch into them’ and that every man at Fort Lyon was eager to join Chivington’s expedition against the Indians (Brown 1970, 84).

Not every person at the Fort was interested in participating in Chivington’s mission. When Captain Silas Soule, Lieutenant Joseph Cramer, and Lieutenant James Connor learned of Chivington’s plans to march on and attack Black Kettle’s camp, they tried to dissuade him by explaining that the band was friendly and had been promised protection as prisoners of war. These objections made the Colonel furious.

Chivington became violently angry at them and brought his fist down close to Lieutenant Cramer’s face. “Damn, any man who sympathizes with Indians!” he cried. “I have come to kill Indians, and believe it is right and honorable to use any means under God’s heaven to kill Indians” (Brown 1970, 85).

The men began their forty-mile march north toward the camp that night, with plans to arrive at dawn.

The Sand Creek Massacre began in the early morning hours of November 29, 1864, when Colonel Chivington and 700 Colorado militiamen attacked a camp of Arapaho and Cheyenne people. Officially, this camp was on the reserve established for them under the protection of the Treaty of Fort Wise, signed by the Cheyenne Chief
Black Kettle. The attack occurred despite every sign that the encampment was friendly. Soldiers from Colorado’s Third Cavalry ignored an American Flag and a white flag of truce, which flew above the camp. Some of the people at the encampment survived the attack, though the estimated number of Cheyenne and Arapaho killed in the massacre varies. Sources generally cite a number over 200. This number includes individuals who had been instrumental in negotiating with the U.S. government, such as White Antelope, War Bonnet, and Standing in the Water, all brutally murdered on the prairie that day.

During the subsequent trials regarding the Sand Creek Massacre, most of the individuals testifying agreed that between two-thirds and three-fourths of those killed in the event were women and children. In the aftermath of the massacre, the tribes struggled to regroup. “The death of so many key figures created a terrible void in tribal leadership” (Smith et al. 2014, 8). The massacre forced the tribes to give up on the pursuit of peace, as well as their trust of White settlers, and start to retaliate, which put those colonizing Colorado in more danger than ever.

One of the most horrific aspects of the Sand Creek Massacre was the U.S. soldiers’ treatment of the bodies. Detailed accounts of the soldiers’ actions were recorded in letters written by two soldiers who refused to fight, Captain Silas Soule and Lieutenant Joseph Cramer. As previously stated, most of those killed were elderly, women, and children, including infants who were scalped or otherwise mutilated by Colorado soldiers. These “trophies” were taken back to Denver and displayed during a play at the Denver Theater a week after Chivington and the Third Regiment returned to Denver (Clemmer-Smith et al. 2014, 8).
“Whether Evans and Chivington cynically provoked an Indian war to advance their personal ambitions or simply were so certain of one that expectation proved self-fulfilling, the result was the same” (Utley 2003, 87). Evans’s actions as governor and attitudes toward the tribes in Colorado played a pivotal role in the Sand Creek Massacre as concluded in an 1865 congressional report; “It is true that there seems to have existed among the people inhabiting that region of the country a hostile feeling towards the Indians.” Admittedly, certain members of certain tribes had attacked White settlers, “but no effort seems to have been made by the authorities there to prevent these hostilities, other than by the commission of even worse acts” (The Sand Creek Massacre 2015, 138). The Sand Creek Massacre is an example of the United States government’s chronically horrific treatment of Indigenous people and its penchant for choosing violence over diplomacy. This tendency had long-term repercussions for the tribes and, arguably, the United States as a whole.

**Memory and Sand Creek**

The powerful force of memory immediately starts to work on the events at Sand Creek, beginning with one of the instigators of the massacre, Colonel John Chivington. Ari Kelman describes Chivington’s actions, post-Sand Creek:

...John Chivington was a relentlessly political figure. He had a strong interest in furthering his career and, so, in the immediate aftermath of the massacre, John Chivington understood that he needed to control the spin around what had happened at Sand Creek and he, I would say, lobbed the first volleys in what would ultimately become protracted fights over the memory of Sand Creek. Chivington sent dispatches to his commander explaining to his commander that...Chivington’s men... had attacked a village that he said had been bristling with warriors. In retrospect, that obviously wasn’t true. He went on to insist that the native people in that village had been responsible...for depredations... He said that his men had recovered the remains of white settlers that had been murdered
by the native people in that camp. Later that day Chivington sent a note to the
press in Denver, again trying very, very hard to control how this event would be
remembered in its immediate aftermath. So, as the bodies of his victims were still
cooling nearby, John Chivington already had his eye on posterity
(SmithsonianNMAI, 2014b).

John Chivington’s version of the events at Sand Creek, combined with the months of
fearmongering about the intentions of tribal peoples in the territory by Governor John
Evans were quickly adopted by Coloradans. The Rocky Mountain News reported on the
massacre on December 8th, 1864 by publishing letters from Chivington and others about
Sand Creek. These letters are deferential to the soldiers wounded or killed but go on to
boast about the numbers of lodges and the amount of equipment and horses taken. There
was also a focus on the “celebrated chiefs” who were killed. Chivington described it as
“almost an annihilation of the entire tribe.” Seeming to cover all his bases, he ends one
letter with a message for anyone who might disagree with his actions:

I will state for the consideration of gentlemen who are opposed to fighting these
red scoundrels, that I was shown, by my Chief Surgeon, the scalp of a white man
taken from the lodge of one of the Chiefs, which could not have been more than
two or three days taken; and I could mention many more things to show how
these Indians, who have been drawing Government rations at Fort Lyon, are and
have been acting (quoted in the “Great Battle with the Indians! The Savages
Dispersed!”, 1864).

The insinuation is that the tribes were not only committing atrocities against White
settlers but also preying on the kindnesses of Whites and their civilization by consuming
rations given to them.

These justifications for the killing at Sand Creek seem to have won over Denver
residents. In the Rocky Mountain News, Chivington’s “bloodless third” was newly
christened the “bloody thirdsters” after their “grand march” through Denver when
returning from Sand Creek. The soldiers paraded into town, led by a band. Citizens
crowded the streets, cheering for the soldiers,

    and the fair sex took advantage of the opportunity, wherever they could get it, of
    expressing their admiration for the gallant boys who donned the regimentals for
    the purpose of protecting the women of the country, by ridding it of red-skins

Chivington’s reports, following the fear John Evans was able to raise in the territory,
brought citizens relief and elevated the soldiers of the Third Cavalry to the level of
heroes.

    It is probable that John Chivington’s version of the events at Sand Creek would
have become the official historical record if not for the letters of Silas Soule and Joseph
Cramer. These men were out on the plains that day but refused to participate in the
brutality of the massacre. Knowing Chivington would say that those who opposed him
did so because they were cowards, as well as traitors to their own race and that they
would likely face discipline for their inaction at Sand Creek, they wrote letters to their
superiors describing the brutality of Sand Creek. These letters inspired investigations by
the federal government, which would begin the long road to justice for the murdered
Cheyenne and Arapaho.

    In January of 1865, less than two months after the Sand Creek Massacre, Major
Edward Wynkoop submitted the results of an investigation he conducted into
Chivington’s actions. Wynkoop interviewed members of the First Cavalry at Fort Lyon
who, among other things, called Colonel Chivington’s behavior before marching on Sand
Creek that of “an inhuman monster” and the events of the Sand Creek Massacre “the
most fearful atrocities...that were ever heard of” (Smith et al. 2014, 79). His incriminating report led to investigations by both Congress and the military.

The Congressional investigation was carried out by the Joint Committee on the Conduct of War (JCCW) in Washington D.C. The details of the brutality at Sand Creek given in testimony were omitted from the report, but the language surrounding it indicates the weight of the acts;

It is difficult to believe that beings in the form of men, and disgracing the uniform of United States soldiers and officers, could commit or countenance the commission of such acts of cruelty and barbarity as are detailed in the testimony… (The Joint Committee on the Conduct of War 1865, IV).

In the list of those called to testify about the massacre, there is not a single representative from the tribes. During his testimony, James P. Beckwourth, who was a mixed-race African American man also called Medicine Calf, was questioned about what the Cheyenne and Arapaho had told him in the wake of the massacre. Chivington objected to this, calling it hearsay. The report explains,

The statements of Indians are never received as evidence even when the Indians are personally present, except in cases where it is specifically authorized by statute. In other words, it requires an express congressional enactment to render an Indian a competent witness, as in cases of violation of the Indian intercourse laws (The Sand Creek Massacre 2015, 122).

Further in Beckwourth’s testimony, he was permitted to explain some things he was told by Evans and Chivington, “although they must have known it was too late to avoid a general Indian war...sent Medicine Calf Beckwourth as an emissary to Black Kettle to see if there was any possibility of peace” (Brown 1970, 91). Cheyenne and Arapaho survivors had told him about the massacre and its aftermath, which included the news that the tribes spurned the chiefs Black Kettle and Left Hand and began to look toward
war leaders to save them from being winnowed out by Whites. Black Kettle “drifted off somewhere with a handful of relatives and old men”. He spoke to the new leading chief who replaced Black Kettle named Leg-in-the-Water and could quote him in court. Beckwourth attempted to persuade Leg-in-the-Water to make peace with the Whites since they were not numerous enough to outnumber White soldiers. Beckwourth’s recounting of Leg-in-the-Water’s response appears in the Sand Creek Massacre Report the following year,

We know it...but what do we want to live for? The white man has taken our country, killed all of our game; was not satisfied with that, but killed our wives and children. Now no peace. We want to go and meet our families in the spirit land. We loved the whites until we found out they lied to us and robbed us of what we had. We have raised the battle ax until death (The Sand Creek Massacre 2015, 123).

From present day, we can see this quote in the historical context of the devastation caused by the American Indian Wars.

Despite Chivington having resigned his post and the investigation lacking the teeth to punish him, the summary of the investigation labeled him as fiendish and cruel. The JCCW even calls out Chivington’s “cowardice” because he chose to attack a camp made up of peaceful prisoners of war, murdering mostly women and children. The army was aware of bands that were committing hostilities toward Whites residing a few days' march from Fort Lyon, but these forces were matched in number with Chivington's. Black Kettle’s band on Sand Creek was an overall easier target giving Chivington an easy victory.

John Evans, Colorado territorial governor and ex-officio Superintendent of Indian Affairs, was reprimanded for sidestepping questions and being unwilling to acknowledge
the brutal atrocities committed against the Cheyenne and Arapaho camped at Sand Creek. In statements like, “Even if there had been wrongs committed, it does not prove those who magnify them to be worthy of special confidence, nor all the people of the border to be barbarians” (Smith et al. 2014, 91), Evans was using equivocal language during his testimony. In their conclusion, the JCCW described Evans’s performance during his testimony; 

His Testimony before your committee was characterized by such prevarication and shuffling as has been shown by no witness they have examined during the four years they have been engaged in their investigations; and for the evident purpose of avoiding the admission that he was fully aware that the Indians massacred so brutally at Sand creek, were then, and had been, actuated by the most friendly feelings towards whites, and had done all in their power to restrain those less friendly disposed. (The Sand Creek Massacre 2015, IV)

In February 1865, Silas Soule was the first to testify at the military investigation in Washington D.C., followed closely by Joseph Cramer. Both men detailed the awful truth of the cold-blooded massacre and diminished the narrative that Sand Creek was a triumphant battle for the West. For Silas Soule, changing the narrative this way, insisting on truth, and defending those tribes which had been friendly would cost him his life (Kelman 2013, 177). These investigations also cost John Evans his career. Evans returned to Colorado and, a few months later, resigned from his office as Governor at the behest of both the congressional committee and newly sworn-in president, Andrew Johnson.

Outside the Colorado territory, there was public outcry against the massacre and mutilation of the Cheyenne and Arapaho due to the brutality of the event. It also caused White Americans to become disillusioned with the federal government. The federal government's method for dealing with land disputes between Indigenous Americans and
encroaching European Americans, which Governor John Evans was supposed to be implementing as ex-officio Superintendent of Indian Affairs, was to make treaties with the tribes. It bargained for the most land for White settlement with the least amount of conflict. This precedent had been set in the early days of the United States by George Washington, who conducted business with tribes as he would with any other self-governing nation. This policy has largely been retained by subsequent presidential administrations, to lesser or greater degrees. American people seemed to generally feel comfortable with this arrangement because it seemed to honorably allow for westward expansion (Smith et al. 2014, 42). But the Sand Creek Massacre showed that the federal government was not achieving westward expansion and their advantage over Indigenous American populations with honor. The JCCW report seems to acknowledge this, referring to U.S. Indian Affairs as “byword and reproach” (The Joint Committee on the Conduct of War 1865, V). Moreover, it challenged some individuals’ beliefs in Manifest Destiny. If this land was meant for White settlers in a way that was ordained by God, then why was it obtained through false and broken promises, sneak attacks, and all-out brutality?

John Evans returned from Washington D.C. to Denver in April 1865 after having been gone for five months dealing with the aftermath of the massacre. Despite the shameful circumstances under which he was removed from office, his return was met with joy. The Rocky Mountain News expressed gratitude for his hard work for the territory while in Washington D.C. A brass band composed of veterans performed outside his house on the evening he returned, and Evans came out to speak to the crowd. Silas
Soule was assassinated on the streets of Denver only hours before Evans returned to the city that day. It is likely that his damning testimony in the Sand Creek Massacre investigations was the motivation for the murder (Smith et al. 2014, 83-84).

The *Rocky Mountain News* tried to equivocate to protect Chivington’s narrative of the massacre, as well as Evans’s reputation, and absolve both of wrongdoing at Sand Creek.

This change has been made to avoid the embarrassment that might ensue to the Administration from disregarding the recommendations on the Committee on the Conduct of the War, in their report on the Sand Creek affair, and not from any want of confidence in Gov. Evans (“Gov. Evans Resigns”, 1865).

The article goes on to call the investigation a defamatory assault on not only Evans but the entire population of the Colorado territory as well.

When slander gets official sanction and injures the best of our public men, it is time that all good men open their eyes to its enormity. There is a limit even to political hostility, with honorable and honest men. Foul play and injustice will in the end only injure the parties who practice it. There is not a shadow of a doubt but that the attack of the committee on Gov. Evans was procured through the vile misrepresentations by personal and political enemies, for the express purpose of securing his removal. This they could not do, yet they secured the publication or the vilest slander upon the Governor, and the people of Colorado, that has ever been published by an official authority in the history of the country. This resignation is its consequence (“Gov. Evans Resigns”, 1865).

As with so many political figures, before and since, that have found themselves surrounded by scandal, champions of John Evans disregarded any criticism, regardless of how legitimate, and claimed that the problem was with self-seeking enemies of the Governor and not the Governor himself.

Evans never left Colorado again, despite the massacre ending his political career and his wife’s disdain for the area. “He had no need to depart because of Sand Creek,
which was more likely to win praise than blame from most non-native Coloradans” (Smith et al. 2014, 21). He continued to advocate for Colorado’s statehood and railroad development. The territorial legislature, while formulating the prospective state government in 1865, listed John Evans as their selection for one of two senators, if congress and President Andrew Johnson approved Colorado’s admission to the union. It did not pass, and John Evans gave up his efforts to ever hold public office thereafter.

On July 3, 1897, John Evans passed away a revered figure. “As he lay on his deathbed, local officials detoured pedestrians and street cars from the vicinity of his home at 14th and Arapahoe Streets [in downtown Denver] so as not to disturb his final hours” (Smith et al. 2014, 22). His funeral is one of the largest in Colorado history and his body was placed for public viewing in the state capitol. Shortly before his death, Rocky Mountain News made a seldom seen reference to the Sand Creek Massacre, which dismissed any allegations aimed at the governor thirty-two years earlier, saying they were just “malicious misrepresentation” and that he entered retirement “enjoying the fullest confidence of the people of the territory” (Smith et al. 2014, 23). Streets, towns, and even one of the highest peaks in the front range of the Rocky Mountains, visible from Denver, have been named for him, glorifying the man and, through that, his actions. John Evans was a prominent founder of both Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois, and the University of Denver in Denver, Colorado, two institutions that continue to grapple with his memory and his contributions to this day.

Idolization even fell on the man leading the atrocities on the ground that day at Sand Creek for decades after the fact. Looking back, Colonel John Chivington might be
exemplifying Hannah Arendt’s concept of “the banality of evil.” On the one hand, he could be a man who, on some level, was just trying to advance his career from military colonel to political office. On the other hand, he and the men at his direction massacred peaceful people. What we know of Chivington might be said to be incongruous at the very least. This man led soldiers on a mission to commit genocide. But, in the decade before the Civil War, Chivington was known as a Methodist minister and an abolitionist working to keep the Kansas territory free for Black Americans (Kelman 2014). This information is less incongruous when we view Chivington as an agent of the state, as well, making his actions painfully routine from a historical perspective.

Nevertheless, Chivington was revered by the press in Colorado for the rest of his life. The Rocky Mountain News included a statement in their reporting of the events at Sand Creek that Chivington was “looking fine as usual though a little fiercer than formerly, and no wonder” (“Daily News” 1864). On October 4, 1883, nearly two decades after the massacre, the Fort Collins Courier wrote this about Chivington in an article titled “The Sand Creek Hero”:

Colonel Chivington, the old hero of the Sand Creek Indian fight, which occurred in the earliest days of Colorado’s history will visit us during the Fair and deliver an address. At his advanced age, being sixty-two years old, he is a fine specimen of manhood. His height is over six-feet, and his whole physique is proportionately built. He walks erect, has a deep baritone voice, and in all his actions shows that he was the man of all men to lead that little Sand Creek band of pioneers on to victory. You can see what we Westerners call “sand” written in his every feature, you will not fail to feel aroused by the very magnetism of his words, should you hear him speak. That voice will still sound familiar to many an old settler and that eye glance as keenly as in the days of yore. His appearance is somewhat changed. His hair and beard are whitened with age, but the man presents as commanding an appearance and impresses you with as much earnestness as he did in his younger days. Our citizens are talking of tendering him a reception, and it is to be hoped they will. He deserves it. He sought in his declining years to enjoy the fruits of a
glorious victory, and we candidly believe our citizens will show him the honor he so richly deserves (Fort Collins Courier 1883).

In Colorado, this rosy view of Chivington would carry on long after his death, despite living an unsuccessful life after the massacre.

Sand Creek seemed to remain the American paragon of an attack on Indigenous Americans when referenced in Colorado newspapers. Printed in the Colorado Transcript in May of 1886 was a paragraph, equal parts anxious and reassuring, about the conflict in Southern Colorado with Apaches, referred to as “red devils”. The excerpt closes with, “A little taste of Sand Creek wouldn’t be a bad dose for Gen. Miles to administer” (Colorado Transcript May 5, 1886). The White River War was a conflict the United States entered to secure the removal of the Utes from Colorado. One battle between a group of Utes and another group of Whites, led by a federal Indian agent named Nathan Meeker, resulted in the death of Meeker and nine others. In the wake of this Ute victory, “some outraged Coloradans fondly recalled John Chivington and called for ‘another Sand Creek’ to quiet the Utes forever” (Kelman 2013, 215).

There were many vocal critics of Sand Creek who did not accept the Chivington narrative. Two prominent dissenters were George Bent and Helen Hunt Jackson. The latter was a so-called Indian Reformer, seeking to expose the United States’ violation of its treaties with Indigenous American tribes and improve the government’s policies under the Department of Indian Affairs. She did this through letters to newspapers at first. Her harsh critique of the military's handling of Sand Creek caused William Byers, founder and editor of the Rocky Mountain News, to engage in a print war with Jackson. No matter how many primary sources Jackson quoted, Byers always came back to one point,
Jackson was from back east so she could not possibly understand. If she had been in Colorado, if she had seen the bodies of the Hungate family, if she had not been living a life of luxury and security, she would understand.

During this print war, Jackson wrote her first work on the topic titled *Century of Dishonor*, which followed similar points as her newspaper letters, showed the agreements and treaties the government had reneged on and the dire consequences for both the tribes and Americans. Efforts in the American Indian Wars took troops and $30 million away from the effort to put down the rebellion in the southern states during the Civil War. Compiling all the atrocities committed against Indigenous Americans in one volume emphasized that the Sand Creek Massacre was the rule, rather than the exception. Ari Kelman compares the significance of *Century of Dishonor* to Dee Brown’s *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee*, published just under a century later. Jackson’s book was also a challenge to lawmakers as shown in the following passage;

> It lies in appeal to the heart and the conscience of the American people. What the people demand, Congress will do. It has been—to our shame be it spoken—at the demand of part of the people that all these wrongs have been committed, these treaties broken, these robberies done, by the Government. So long as there remains on our frontier one square mile of land occupied by a weak and helpless owner, there will be a strong and unscrupulous frontiersman ready to seize it, and a weak and unscrupulous politician, who can be hired for a vote or for money, to back him (Jackson 1886, 30).

To ensure the work’s intended effect, Jackson “sent copies, bound in red and embossed with a quote from Ben Franklin—‘Look upon your hands! They are stained with the blood of your relations.’—to every member of Congress” (Kelman 2013, 217). Between *Century of Dishonor* and her next work *Ramona*, a love story with characters who belonged to the tribes Jackson worked with in California. She hoped that a novel would
attract those who were not interested in the dry facts presented in *Century of Dishonor*. Jackson said, "If I could write a story that would do for the Indian one-hundredth part what *Uncle Tom's Cabin* did for the negro, I would be thankful the rest of my life" (Jackson quote in Mathes 1990, 77). Though *Ramona* was not as successful largely because society did not see the hardships of enslaved people and Indigenous Americans as equivalent. Nonetheless, the book is said to have had a broad impact on public opinion and government reformation of Federal Indian Policy.

George Bent, son of William Bent, was half-Cheyenne and a fierce proponent of bringing the Cheyenne interpretation of the Massacre to the attention of the general population. After Chivington’s death, his defenders, many of whom were men who fought under him, sought to attach the old Sand Creek stories and tales of glory to the Civil War narrative, which would eventually result in the Denver Civil War Monument. Bent saw this happening and decided to tell his tribe's side of the story. In the early twentieth century, a publication called *Frontier* regularly published his letters. Bent also exchanged letters and maps with a historian, George Hyde which were compiled into a book titled *Life of George Bent: Written From His Letters*. In this memoir, Bent also gave some exceptionally raw perspectives on the United States government’s American Indian policies. For example, he proposed that when Chivington chose to fire on the camp at Sand Creek despite the American flag flying atop Black Kettle’s lodge, the colonel “demonstrated that the U.S. government would desecrate even ‘its own symbol of peace in the name of genocide, a practice that has characterized federal/tribal relations throughout history” (Kelman 2013, 119). The information Bent recorded is valuable, not
only in straightening out the record on Sand Creek, but also in recording ceremonies and rituals as they were becoming increasingly rare, if not altogether extinct. He also helped create a written record for Indigenous American history, which helped it attain the same level of credibility as the centuries of recorded Western history. Together, the work of Bent and Hyde “constituted an intellectual threat to the Civil War memories propagated by veterans of the first and third Colorado Regiments” (Kelman 2013, 94).

For speaking out, George Bent attracted the ire of Jacob Downing, who had been a major in the Colorado First Cavalry, one of the companies that participated in the Sand Creek Massacre and served as legal counsel for Chivington in the subsequent investigation. Downing was outraged that Bent, an Indigenous American man, was daring to call white men “uncivilized” in his critiques of the military’s actions at Sand Creek. He called Bent a “cutthroat, and a thief, a liar and a scoundrel, but worst of all, a halfbreed” (Kelman 2013, 95). Downing further defended Chivington’s statements on what happened at Sand Creek as the truth.

Downing then worked with a number of other people in Colorado, local heritage organizations to try and memorialize the service of Coloradans in the United States Civil War; service, it’s important to understand, for the most part, overwhelmingly was very, very noble (Kelman, SmithsonianNMAI, 2014b).

This work resulted in the Denver Civil War Monument at the center of this research.

The Monument

Soon after Memorial Day in 1905, Governor McDonald and others, along with the Colorado Pioneers Association, firmed up plans for “the erection of the monument to Colorado veterans who died in the Civil War” (Brush Tribune 1905). In January 1907, the *Yuma Pioneer* reported that a shaft of granite from Texas Creek, Colorado had been
selected for the monument's base and a basic design plan was described which closely resembles the finished piece as it exists today (Yuma Pioneer 1907). The monument was unveiled in July of 1909 with veterans of the first, second, and third cavalry present. The occasion was marked by a ceremony with speakers and pomp:

The unveiling committee, composed of Capt. W. H. Green, W. A. Smith, and Hon. Sam Dorsey, gathered below the statue and pulled the cords. The American flags, which have covered it since its erection, dropped to the pedestal, and the bronze soldier stood out in relief as the crowd applauded. Under command of Lieutenant Le Fevre, Battery A, First Artillery, N. G. C., fired a salute of twenty-one guns (Las Animas Leader 1909).

It almost goes without saying that the monument at the Denver Capitol building celebrates and memorializes those responsible for the Sand Creek Massacre by placing it in equal standing next to Civil War battles (Cortés and Sloan, 2013). Jacob Downing, Governor McDonald, and many others, including several heritage organizations in Colorado “smoothed away the rough edges of Sand Creek and they cast John Chivington’s story of the massacre in bronze” (Kelman, SmithsonianNMAI, 2014b).

Built in 1909, this monument also falls into a pattern that was prevalent at the time of “the post-Civil War ‘statue mania’ era, when patriotic lobbies and nostalgic constituencies created public art to honor historical subjects” (Doss 2014, 41) and shaped the way posterity would remember the Civil War.

Over the next few decades, the Civil War Monument remained static, while the world around it began to change, and, with it, the perspectives on Sand Creek and the way it was remembered. On August 6, 1950, two markers went up around the site of Sand Creek. The first was erected by the Colorado Arkansas Valley Incorporated (J. Campbell, personal communication, May 5, 2017) and placed on what is now referred to
as the Monument Overlook, a bluff that overlooks the Sand Creek killing field. The monument is a small wedge of stone made of Colorado red granite and engraved with the image of a Brave in a halo warbonnet with the words “Sand Creek/ Battle Ground/ Nov. 29 & 30, 1864” engraved underneath. The choice to call the site a battleground “was a way of trying to make sure that John Chivington’s perspective on Sand Creek would remain vibrant into the future” (Kelman, SmithsonianNMAI, 2014b). The Colorado Historical Society placed a second marker that directed visitors to the site on State Highway 96. The marker read “Sand Creek Battle or Massacre.” This painfully ambiguous language is an indication that the way Sand Creek was remembered began to change at this time.

There are a few potential reasons for this change in thinking. In the build-up to World War II, the United States federal government was putting considerable effort into memorializing itself through the lens of the Civil War to show that the country had always fought for freedom. It became easier for those in Colorado to view the state’s history during the Civil War and the state’s history in relation to the Sand Creek Massacre as two distinct histories, rather than intricately woven together (Kelman, SmithsonianNMAI, 2014b).

The way Americans remember began to transform further with the advent of the 1960s and the modern civil rights movement when more individuals became open to hearing from marginalized voices in the mainstream and critiques of racial injustice, both past and present. As the country mourned the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King in 1968, the American Indian Movement was forming. The group initiated several high-
profile protests and other activist efforts, like the nineteen-month-long occupation of Alcatraz Island, based on the broken promises in the Treaty of Fort Laramie, which began in November of 1969. This demonstration began just days before the 105th anniversary of the massacre at Sand Creek. Ari Kelman also links this cultural awakening to Americans’ disapproval of the Vietnam War, particularly after the My Lai massacre, its subsequent cover-up attempts, and the growing awareness of “the capacity of U.S. soldiers to slaughter innocent civilians” (Kelman 2013, 211). Furthering this change in perspective, the New Age movement came to prevalence in the next decade in Western nations which increased interest in and fascination with a variety of spiritual beliefs, including those of Indigenous American cultures. With studying these “new” perspectives came different ways of understanding the past, as well as understanding the Indigenous cultures themselves.

During this cultural moment, Dee Brown’s *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee* was published. The book chronicles a thirty-year period, between 1860 and 1890, primarily what Brown describes as the “opening” of the West and the destruction of Indigenous American cultures and civilizations. Brown called the work an “Indian history” and tried to use the voices of Indigenous Americans in his work, allowing members of tribes to tell their own stories with minimal interference from their oppressors. Some were critical of the book, particularly historians. One criticism was that Brown seemed to accept everything said by Indigenous Americans as factual. Another critique referred to the portrayal of the tribes’ lack of agency in their own history (Kelman 2013, 211-212). It is clear, however, that Brown regarded the attack on Sand Creek as a massacre.
The massacre did not feature prominently in the minds of Coloradans again until the late 1990s when Senator Ben Nighthorse Campbell sought to create a national historic site, turning what was once the killing field into a memorial for those murdered in the massacre. Then state senator, Bob Martinez, put forth a resolution to have “Sand Creek” removed from the Civil War monument outside the Colorado capitol building in 1998. “Located just outside the capitol’s front door and looming high above Civic Center Park, Denver’s most important municipal public space, the monument offered a de facto city-and state-sponsored memory of the bloodshed at Sand Creek” (Kelman 2013, 73). Martinez proposed the resolution not only because the massacre was incorrectly grouped in with a list titled “Battles and Engagements,” but also because he believed the event had nothing to do with the Civil War. Both viewpoints were included in the resolution, which passed in May of 1998, as justification for removing Sand Creek from the monument. Ari Kelman describes the link between the Sand Creek Massacre and the Civil War by going back to the beliefs of Colonel Chivington. “He always insisted that the engagement had been a legitimate part of the fight to preserve the Union and to spread civilization into the West.” While those in the east were at war to keep the south, Chivington claimed to have evidence that many of the tribes in the west were allied with each other and the Confederacy, despite deep-rooted grievances between the tribes which had existed long before White colonizers arrived in the area. The fight against tribes in the west was very much related to saving the very soul of the nation, in the same way it was in the east, he believed (Kelman 2014).
Regardless of his intentions, Senator Martinez had made one of the most common mistakes in American politics, as George Bent, Helen Hunt Jackson, and members of marginalized groups would tell us. He failed to consult the parties who were affected by the misremembering of the Sand Creek Massacre. Fortunately, David Halaas, the Colorado state historian at the time who was working with the National Park Service to locate the exact site of the Sand Creek Massacre, saw the misstep. “After learning the State Senator Bob Martinez...had not consulted ‘the tribally recognized and official Sand Creek Descendants organizations in Oklahoma and Montana,” Halaas decided to step in (Kelman 2013, 76). Having established a strong and trusting relationship with Chief Laird Cometsevah and Steve Brady, heads of the Sand Creek Descendants’ organizations for the Southern Cheyenne and Northern Cheyenne, respectively, Halaas inquired about their feelings on the proposal to grind the massacre off the plaque.

Brady and Cometsevah attended a State Capitol Building Advisory Committee meeting on July 31, 1998 and presented letters from a few representatives of the Northern and Southern Cheyenne that asked the government to reconsider removing “Sand Creek” from the monument. Cometsevah and Brady’s letter argued that, while they “appreciated the ‘sentiment that Sand Creek should be considered a massacre and not a battle worthy of celebration’ they worried nevertheless that the massacre had already been forgotten often enough in ‘history books of the public mind.” Chief Cometsevah also believed it was foolish to enact this institutionalized forgetting while efforts to create a historic site to remember the massacre had been underway (Kelman 2013, 76). They wrote,

Rather than erase the words ‘SAND CREEK’ from the list of ‘Battles and Engagements’, we wish that interpretative signage be placed around the Civil War
Memorial statue that would inform and educate the public about the holocaust of Sand Creek and its meaning to all peoples (Brady and Cometsevah 1998, Appendix A).

This memorandum reads as polite and to the point. Other letters brought before the committee were less restrained. A letter from Homer Flute, a member of the Sand Creek Massacre Trust who would go on to unsuccessfully sue for the reparations the United States Government had promised in the aftermath of the massacre (Gorski 2012), argued:

The mass murder of unarmed old men, woman [sic] and children who were in the custody of the U.S. army does not signify a battle in any since [sic] of the word.

In 1864 the political leadership of Colorado was motivated by a covetous desire for land. False crises were created to manipulate public fear and prejudice into public hysteria to justify the planed [sic] atrocities to be committed on peaceful bands of Indians. John Chivington, a Methodist Preacher in command of the Colorado Volunteers and U.S. Troops on November 29, 1864 invaded the sanctuary of the peaceful bands of Indians and indiscriminately attacked and mercilessly slaughtered and mutilated old men, women and children, despite the American flag, “indicating American protection,” and the White flag “a symbol for surrender,” flying over their camp at Sand Creek Colorado.

We will not support any action that will tailor the actions of John Chivington, the Colorado Volunteers and U.S. Troops, to receive the same respect due to the many legitimate battles during the Civil War (Flute 1998, Appendix B).

The request of Flute, Brady, and Cometsevah, and the people they were speaking for, is clear; correct the biased lens through which the history of Sand Creek had been viewed, a bias which was perpetuated by the Denver Civil War Monument representing Colorado on the steps of its Capitol. Colorado forces participated in many actual battles, but that did not preclude them from also having committed a massacre. They believed the latter must be in plain sight to encourage the public to confront it. Along with David Halaas, representatives from the descendants of Sand Creek asked the government to clarify some of history’s wrongs by passing a different resolution.
In 1999, the Colorado Senate passed Senate Joint Resolution 99-017 which legislated, that the Capital Development Committee, working with the Colorado Historical Society, should erect an interpretive sign or memorial for permanent display on the Capitol grounds that would explain the historical significance of the Sand Creek massacre to Colorado and the United States (Colorado Senate 1999).

Less than two months before the unveiling ceremony on November 29th, 2002, the final text written by the State Historical Society was approved. A few weeks later, those working on the plaque realized they had missed another opportunity to involve the tribes in a project that affected them, as Kelman points out in the following:

Otto Braided Hair, director of the Northern Cheyenne Sand Creek office, explained in a letter ‘that he was very disappointed his people were not consulted regarding the content of the plaque text.’ He offered suggestions for substantive changes before noting that Joe Big Medicine-- who, along with Laird Cometsevah, served as a Sand Creek representative for the Southern Cheyenne tribe--would need to do the same. Steve Tammeus, the legislative staffer overseeing the project, assured Braided Hair that he “would consider” the descendants’ input (Kelman 2013, 202).

Casting the bronze plaque was delayed until final revisions could be made.

Four and a half years after the initial 1998 resolution to recontextualize the monument, SJR 99-017 finally resulted in a plaque added to the monument on the 138th anniversary of the massacre in 2002. The plaque reads:

The controversy surrounding this Civil War Monument has become a symbol of Coloradans' struggle to understand and take responsibility for our past. On November 29, 1864, Colorado's First and Third Cavalry, commanded by Colonel John Chivington, attacked Chief Black Kettle's peaceful camp of Cheyenne and Arapaho Indians on the banks of Sand Creek, about 180 miles southeast of here. In the surprise attack, soldiers killed more than 150 of the village's 500 inhabitants. Most of the victims were elderly men, women, and children. Though some civilians and military personnel immediately denounced the attack as a massacre, others claimed the village was a legitimate target. This Civil War Monument, paid for by funds from the Pioneers' Association and the State, was erected on July 24, 1909, to honor all Colorado soldiers who had fought in battles of the Civil War in Colorado and elsewhere. By designating Sand Creek a battle,
the monument’s designers mischaracterized the actual events. Protests led by some Sand Creek descendants and others throughout the twentieth century have since led to the widespread recognition of the tragedy as the Sand Creek Massacre.

Though this addition does deliver a more inclusive interpretation of the Sand Creek Massacre, the plaque itself appears next to the monument, flat against a stone retaining wall.

Chief Cometsevah and others were happy with the recontextualization but feared that, the plaque dedication “would allow ‘white people to think they’ve paid their debts to the Cheyennes’ and that the new plaque would not substantively shift collective memory of Sand Creek” (Kelman 2013, 204). These fears turned out to be well-founded. Editorials in the media continued to tout a version of those responsible for the massacre as the “drunk militia” and the “power-hungry man” who led them, Chivington, instead of being a systemic issue of federally encouraged genocide. Interactions between tribes and White settlers and events like the Sand Creek Massacre appeared to be the rule rather than the exception.

The Colorado government has technically fulfilled the goal of SJR 99-017 to include a memorial or additional interpretive context, though some believe it did not fulfill the spirit of the resolution and continue to push for more memorialization for those murdered by U.S. troops at Sand Creek (Verlee 2015).

A special tradition began in 1999 to use memory to heal the emotional scars of the massacre-- the Sand Creek Spiritual Healing Run initiated by Lee Lone Bear. As noted in a National Park Service publication,
Lee Lone Bear, a Northern Cheyenne descendant of massacre survivors, not only remembers the victims of the massacre, but also seeks healing for all people, regardless of ethnicity, race, or religion. In this way, the Sand Creek Spiritual Healing Run is for everyone (National Park Service 2019).

The event, which takes place annually on the anniversary of the massacre, is a 173-mile run from the Sand Creek National Historic Site to the steps of the Colorado State Capitol. Just before their destination, the participants stop at 15th and Arapahoe streets in Denver to honor the life of Captain Silas Soule in the place where he was murdered for speaking out against the violence committed on the prairie that day.

In 2014, to remember the 150th Anniversary of the Sand Creek Massacre, Colorado Governor John Hickenlooper spoke to those gathered on the steps of the Capitol for the Sand Creek Healing Run ceremonies. This speech became something that Indigenous Americans have only rarely seen from government officials, an apology for atrocities committed against them by military and citizens alike.

In his speech, Governor Hickenlooper emphasized remembering and facing Colorado’s difficult heritage. He gave a haunting description of the massacre, quoting Silas Soule’s account of the barbaric actions of supposedly civilized men as well as the people who cheered them on. After making the weight of this history clear, he began to express regret for it:

Today, we gather here to fully acknowledge what happened--the massacre of Sand Creek. There is no rationalizing; there should be no sugar-coating history. We should not be afraid to criticize and condemn that which is inexcusable. So, I am here to offer something that has been too long in coming. On behalf of the State of Colorado, I want to apologize. And I don't make that apology lightly...To the runners, to the Tribal Leaders, and to all of the Indigenous people--and the proud and painful legacy you all represent--On behalf of the good, peaceful and loving people of Colorado, I want to say, I am sorry for the atrocity that our government and its agents visited upon your ancestors (Calhoun 2014c).
Though an apology alone is not enough to heal the historical trauma of genocide,

Governor Hickenlooper’s apology has been accompanied by increased collaboration
between Colorado lawmakers and Tribal representatives with more plans to memorialize.

After years of negotiation about additional memorials on the Capitol grounds, in
March 2017, lawmakers passed a resolution to accept a donated sculpture and plaque to
be placed on the grounds of the Colorado State Capitol. The proposed plaque reads:

At daybreak, November 29, 1864, Colorado US Volunteers attacked a Cheyenne
and Arapaho village at Sand Creek in southeastern Colorado Territory that had
been guaranteed safety and protection by the US Army. Cheyenne chief Black
Kettle flew an American flag and a white flag of truce over his lodge - yet the 675
troops, supported by four howitzers, swept the village killing 230 Cheyenne and
Arapaho - mostly women, children, babies, and the elderly and wounding another
200. But for the courageous action of two veteran battalion company
commanders, Capt. Silas S. Soule and Lt. Joseph A. Cramer, who ordered their
companies to stand down and not fire, the entire village of 750 would have been
annihilated. Soldiers then mutilated the dead, carrying "trophies" to Denver to
display them at a theater production. The Sand Creek Massacre opened a full-
scale war on the western plains. Thirty-three chiefs were present at Sand Creek; of
these 18 were killed: Chief Crow (Cheyenne) Spotted Crow (Cheyenne) Left
Hand (Arapaho) Bosse (Arapaho) Heap of Buffalo (Arapaho) Bear Man
(Cheyenne) Warbonnet (Cheyenne) Lone Bear, aka One Eye (Cheyenne) Yellow
Wolf (Cheyenne) Bear Tongue (Cheyenne) White Antelope (Cheyenne) Little
Robe (Cheyenne) Sand Hill (Cheyenne) Left Hand (Cheyenne) Two Thighs
(Cheyenne) Red Arm (Cheyenne) Tall Bull (Cheyenne) Black Horse (Cheyenne)
Cutlip Bear (Cheyenne) The Sand Creek National Historic Site is located in
Kiowa County near Eads, CO (Colorado Senate 2017).

This plaque, and particularly its list of names, goes further than the previous one to
convey the weight of the loss and pain felt by the Descendants of Sand Creek. It also goes
further in its attempts to heal through memorialization. Unfortunately, the plans for this
monument were stalled after the passing of this resolution. Today, they may be a moot
point.
In the summer of 2020, during the Coronavirus pandemic, protests erupted internationally in support of the Black Lives Matter movement and against police brutality and systemic racism in the wake of the death of George Floyd. In Denver, many of these protests took place around the State Capitol and Civic Center Park. This resulted in graffiti, particularly on the Denver Civil War Monument, as the ire of the protests all over the world turned on statues of racist figures, such as slave traders, celebrated confederates, and colonizers like Christopher Columbus.

Figure 4: The Denver Civil War Monument after protests in Denver, CO on May 31, 2020. Photo credit: Sarah Davidson
I visited the monument three times within the month to record the changing graffiti as it was put up, power washed away, and reapplied. On May 31st, after the first weekend of protests, surfaces all over the Capitol grounds had been spray-painted with different messages, including the Civil War Monument, but the recontextual plaque was unaffected.

![Figure 5: The Sand Creek recontextual plaque untouched after protests in Denver, CO on May 31, 2020. Photo credit: Sarah Davidson](image)

When the protests intensified and images of destruction and looting outnumbered images of more peaceful protests, it seemed to some that the monuments vandalized were chosen indiscriminately. The Trump Administration even used this language in the Executive Order titled, “Protecting American Monuments, Memorials, and Statues and Combating Recent Criminal Violence”. The order states,

Key targets in the violent extremists’ campaign against our country are public monuments, memorials, and statues. Their selection of targets reveals a deep ignorance of our history, and is indicative of a desire to indiscriminately destroy anything that honors our past and to erase from the public mind any suggestion
that our past may be worth honoring, cherishing, remembering, or understanding (Executive Order 13933, 2020).

In the case of the Denver Civil War Monument, the assumption that what was happening to monuments was indiscriminate seems incorrect because this monument and the retaining wall around it were covered in spray paint, signs, and chalk, but the plaque was not targeted throughout the Summer 2020 protests.

Figure 6: The Denver Civil War Monument on June 25, 2020, after the statue on top was pulled down by protestors.
Photo by: Sarah Davidson
These protests continued on the steps of the Capitol for weeks with not much change to the condition of the Denver Civil War Monument. Then, in the early morning hours of June 25th, the soldier statue on top of the monument was pulled down by four unknown people. A local resident who came to watch the removal of the toppled statue interviewed by the Denver Post said, “We shouldn’t be celebrating the genocide of Indigenous people...That is what this represents. It is a symbol of white supremacy” (Tabachnik 2020a). Some key lawmakers were outraged, such as Governor Jared Polis, who condemned the vandalism and promised to find and punish those who were responsible. He also promised that the statue would be repaired.

At this time, articles about the statue started referring to it as “On Guard.” The only mention I could find of this title, prior to 2020, was in the biography of the artist, Jack Howland. “On Guard” is the title of the soldier statue specifically. The base of the Denver Civil War Monument, designed by an architect, Frank E. Edbrooke, was unnamed (Mumey 1973). When the two became separate, the statue again began to be referred to as “On Guard”.

Figure 7: The exhibit for “On Guard” on December 18, 2020, at History Colorado Center in Denver, Colorado.
Photo by: Sarah Davidson

Though “On Guard” was separated from its base, the story of the Denver Civil War Monument continues to unfold as the forces of memory change the authorized heritage discourse around it. After “On Guard” came down, History Colorado submitted a proposal for its exhibition and interpretation at the museum. That arrangement was approved for at least a year. I visited this exhibit in December of 2020. The proposal stated that the museum “would display it along with an explanation for why it was created” (Sylte 2020). A more long-term proposal to continue to house “On Guard” at History Colorado is still being negotiated before it is brought before Colorado lawmakers.
The statue is housed in the atrium of History Colorado, near the staircase. On the wall behind it are two panels that briefly summarize the history of Colorado in the Civil War, the statue, and the controversy surrounding it. The interpretation presents both the accomplishments and atrocities of Colorado’s soldiers. While they protected Colorado’s gold at the Battle of Glorieta Pass, they also participated in clearing Indigenous people from Colorado, securing ample room for White settlement. “The over-militarized response was an action of a nation at war, and events like the Sand Creek Massacre sparked decades of government-sanctioned violence against Native Americans in the West” (History Colorado Center 2020b). The included emphasis on the Sand Creek Massacre, as part of a bigger picture of what the United States Government was doing to Indigenous Americans, gives a fuller picture of the historical context.

In the exhibit, “On Guard” is surrounded by a series of panels with quotes from Cheyenne and Arapaho stakeholders about the statue’s removal, as well as insights from veterans, historians, and an artist. Reading the panels from left to right, the first quote is from Flint Whitlock, a military historian, author, and veteran. Whitlock was very upset that the monument was pulled down saying, “The vandals who tore down the statue had no idea of its true meaning and demonstrated their own ignorance and intolerance. As a veteran myself, and a military historian, I believe that defacing history equals erasing history” (History Colorado Center 2020b).

The next perspective presented is that of Gail Ridgely, a descendant of Sand Creek survivors and tribal historian for the Northern Arapaho. While he hopes a new Sand Creek Massacre memorial will take the place of the Denver Civil War Monument,
Ridgely is less concerned about monuments and more concerned about systemic change. He said, “The pandemic has pulled everyone out of the dark and I look forward to having a hate crime law in Wyoming…” (History Colorado Center 2020b). His thoughts remind us that, while symbolic change is important, dismantling systems that allow oppression to go unchecked means so much more to improving the lives of marginalized people.

After Gail Ridgely’s words is a quote attributed to Tim Drago, founder of the Colorado Veterans Monument. Drago’s perspective reads like a compromise between the two sides of the debate surrounding the Denver Civil War Monument. While he believes the monument should remain in public view for the service and sacrifice of veterans that it represents, he hopes for an inclusive decision about where it should go. His suggestion is to display the statue and base “among other military monuments and memorials in a renamed Colorado Veterans Park across from the State Capitol” where Drago’s successful initiative, the Colorado Veterans Monument stands (History Colorado Center 2020b).

The next panel quotes Derek Everett, a Colorado historian and State Capitol scholar. Everett has published two books on Capitol history and the American West, respectively. Everett acknowledges the cavalier representation of the Sand Creek Massacre on the Denver Civil War Monument, but sides with tradition, saying it should return to its base where it had stood since 1909. He also suggests that it should be “accompanied by a more inclusive, honest interpretation of Colorado in the Civil War” (History Colorado Center 2020b). Fred Mosqueda, a member of the Southern Arapaho and Cheyenne Tribe, is quoted on the next panel supporting the need for the story of the
Civil War as it relates to Colorado like the victory at Glorieta Pass, but still acknowledges that to tribal people, the statue has come to be a symbol of those soldiers who committed atrocities at Sand Creek. The monument is tainted by this association. Mosqueda described his position saying,

When the statue fell, I said a little, “Yea! It’s gone…. I’m not saying that Colorado wasn’t in the Civil War and they should not commemorate that victory at Glorieta. History should be told. This was part of our nation’s growth. But the Civil War commemoration and the Sand Creek commemoration are two different things” (History Colorado Center 2020b).

Even allowing for a Civil War-specific lens of the monument, folks impacted by the Sand Creek Massacre generations later still need more to feel as though restorative justice has taken place.

The exhibit next features a panel with the thoughts of Denver artist, Adri Norris. Norris acknowledges that monuments usually have a skewed perspective of history because they generally represent a story told by the winners. The fall of the statue could be a chance to rectify that narrative. “With the toppling of this statue, we have a rare opportunity to address disparities in history and to tell, if not a more complete story, one that elevates stories of those made most vulnerable by the victors actions” (History Colorado Center 2020b). Norris states that understanding how different minorities were impacted by the Civil War helps Americans to gain a better understanding of who we are.

The final panel acts as a kind of exhibit summary, i.e., the story of how the statue came to be in History Colorado and questions regarding what to do with it in the future, namely, to return it to its pedestal or to keep it in a museum context. Some believe that by placing a monument in a museum, it becomes easier for individuals to look at it
objectively. History Colorado’s chief creative officer and director of interpretation and research, Jason Hanson said the museum interpretation is “not as an erasure or reinstallation, but a chance to consider monuments and how we value them.” (Simpson 2020). The panel ends with an invitation for museum visitors to share their opinions in a space for conversation which is set up adjacent to the exhibit.

It is estimated that the clean-up of the Colorado Capitol Building from the protests, mostly graffiti and broken windows, cost $1 million (Hindi 2020). Presumably, that cost also includes the repair of the monument. However, more and more people have been questioning if restoring the statue to its pedestal is the right move. Even a change in context for the monument is likely considered a win by those who pulled it down. What was debated for at least twenty years, through the “proper channels,” like petitions and committees, was more or less successfully accomplished in one night choosing the “improper channels.” Others who are requesting similar changes and being ignored might see this incident as a more expedient option.
Chapter Three Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

The Concept of Heritage

The central issue in many debates over monuments and memorials is the idea of heritage. The word “heritage” can have different meanings to different people. To be clear on its meaning in this project, I have chosen a definition by heritage scholar Laurajane Smith who describes heritage as “a social and cultural practice...of meaning and identity making” (Smith 2006, 13). If heritage is how groups configure their sense of self as well as how they remember their collective past and relate to the present, seeing physical representations of that heritage in public can reinforce these aspects of identity. Conversely, not seeing oneself represented can be detrimental to a group’s conception of their identity or ability to feel they have a place in communities or even modern society.

Since heritage only exists because people have created it, over the centuries there has been considerable debate about what should be covered under the umbrella of “heritage.” “Authorized heritage discourse,” a term coined by Smith in her work, “Uses of Heritage,” is described as “the dominant Western discourse about heritage that works to naturalize a range of assumptions about the nature and meaning of heritage” (Smith 2006, 13).
2006, 4). More often, this discourse only focuses on the material objects of heritage and only includes a limited spectrum of social and cultural histories. If successful, the heritage and corresponding discourse will cultivate ideas of nation and nationhood in its citizens. When heritage is synonymous with only positive and influential historical events, which are believed to have made a community or nation what it is in the present, the contributing material culture is viewed as intrinsically valuable. Officially selected and authorized heritage can also dismiss the historical contributions of minority groups because the “experts” who determine what heritage is may not see these groups as having the “authority of expertise” (Smith 2006, 29).

The push to identify and preserve what we now think of as heritage began during the Enlightenment and Romantic Movements in the latter half of the nineteenth century in Europe and the United States. In 1877, William Morris wrote the influential “Manifesto of the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings” which stated that “anything which can be looked on as artistic, picturesque, historical, antique, or substantial: any work in short, over which educated, artistic people would think it worthwhile to argue at all” (Morris 1877) was worth protecting. In short, Morris and Smith both believe that heritage is heavily determined by “power and knowledge claims of technical and aesthetic experts” (Smith 2006, 11). This privileges heritage classification decisions to those that have participated in hegemonic methods of developing expertise as generally determined by state cultural agencies and other experts. In addition to aforementioned practices of ignoring the histories and perspectives of minority groups, this process of heritage-making also tends to be classist. Smith writes,
“almost inevitably it is the grand and great and ‘good’ that were chosen to ‘remind’ the public about the values and sensibilities that should be saved or preserved as representative of patriotic American and European National identities” (Smith 2006, 23).

Conversely, having a dominant heritage and ideology “also ensures that it can become the focus of alternative meaning for those who dissent” (Graham et al. 2016, 258). Both heritage and the discourse that puts it into place are said to be social practices. “Discourse does not simply refer to the use of words or language, but rather...a form of social practice” (Smith 2006, 4).

While Enlightenment, Romantic, and Conservationist philosophies contributed to the founding of National Parks in the United States and attempted to protect “unspoiled nature,” they also coincided with the erection of many of the Confederate and Western Heritage memorials. The Denver Civil Monument was erected in this era. The combination of timing, financial backers, and inclusion of Sand Creek on the monument as a battle was an attempt to solidify the narrative of grandeur in the history of White people colonizing the western United States. The concept of heritage may have begun with good intentions, if a little I, but the discourse around it became a tool to “make sense of, regulate, and ultimately control the increasing public emergence of local and competing claims to a range of cultural, social, historical and other identities and experiences” (Smith 2006, 298).

If a state legitimizes their version of heritage by winnowing out others in a zero-sum game and encouraging citizens to identify with their nation before their families or communities, dissenters are pushed from peaceful negotiation to protests. Understanding
why those with power and a white-knuckle grip on the material evidence of the dominant culture’s heritage are unwilling to mediate any lasting change with minority stakeholder groups and the effect this has had on groups over generations is essential to dissecting the movements surrounding monuments.

**Restorative Justice**

A key concept I highlight in the process toward healing in communities which have been divided by painful histories is restorative justice. For my project, restorative justice refers to:

> a dialogue between the victim and offender, to allow the offender to understand the harm and make efforts to repair it. On a deeper level, it entails community involvement in social health as a way to build the social ties that make people less likely to hurt one another” (The New York Times Editorial Staff 2020, 8).

This concept has become increasingly well-known and has been applied to many cases which involved righting past wrongs. It is most often applied to issues like criminal justice reform, for instance, releasing those incarcerated for the sale or use of marijuana in a state where the substance is now legal. Another form of restorative justice that has gained traction is monetary reparations. This could apply to any number of situations, but usually refers to those still feeling the effects of the institution of slavery.

Restorative justice is just as relevant in dealing with atrocities committed against Indigenous populations in the United States. Though he doesn’t use the term itself, Chip Colwell, senior curator at the Denver Museum of Nature and Science, writes in his book *Plundered Skulls and Stolen Spirits: Inside the Fight to Reclaim Native America’s Culture*, that even the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA), can be viewed as a movement toward restorative justice; he argues that
“only by directly and systematically confronting the past, through activities like NAGPRA, can the wounds of shared traumas start to heal” (Colwell 2017, 121-122).

NAGPRA was passed in 1990 and, while it was advanced for its time, more action is needed. Applying the combination of crucial factors like giving a voice to those involved, emphasizing healing and accountability, repairing relationships, and reuniting as a stronger community will provide better results which can be customized for the needs of each community working to resolve years, decades, and even centuries of harm (Lyons, (n.d.)). Through these steps, the pain that came about because of monuments like the Denver Civil War Monument and the events they celebrate can begin to heal.

“Difficult Heritage”

The Sand Creek Massacre is a painful event from which descendants of the massacre, as well as Indigenous Americans from different tribes, have historical or generational trauma. It was also celebrated and commemorated for much of Colorado’s history. To get a foundational knowledge on this piece of difficult heritage and how other countries process their dark pasts, this research utilizes Sharon Macdonald’s *Difficult Heritage: Negotiating the Nazi Past in Nuremberg and Beyond* (2009). Macdonald defines “difficult heritage” as,

…a past that is recognised as meaningful in the present but that is also contested and awkward for public reconciliation with a positive, self-affirming contemporary identity. ‘Difficult heritage’ may also be troublesome because it threatens to break through into the present in disruptive ways, opening up social divisions, perhaps by playing into imagined, even nightmarish, futures (Macdonald 2009, 1).

She discusses the struggle for local officials and stakeholders to acknowledge Nazi Party rally grounds in Nuremberg, Germany without causing a “heritage effect”. This happens
when something is designated heritage, which “seems to accord it value and, unless carefully countered, to imply that it is being seen positively and even treasured” (Macdonald 2009, 190). In her book, Macdonald describes how additional monuments and exhibits were used in this project in a way that sterilized the place and walked a tight line between forgetting and remembering without being in denial about Germany’s Nazi past (Colwell-Chanthaphonh 2010).

Kirk Savage’s book, Monument Wars (2009), provides a geographical perspective on memorialization in America. It specifically explores the politics of the remaining memorial space in Washington D.C., particularly on the National Mall. He also covers the history of the memorialization of opinions from the time of the American Founders to more current debates. He concludes that for every narrative a monument carries, many go ignored. Savage discusses how care must be used when memorializing to know exactly who and what is being memorialized and, more importantly, who or what is not being remembered by a particular memorialization (Savage 2009).

Additionally, this research was informed by the work and research of Erika Doss, a well-known historian of American monuments and memorials. In her book Memorial Mania, Doss extensively unpacks her titular term and the reasons, patterns, and emotions behind it. To Doss, “memorial mania” is “a pervasive preoccupation with issues of memory and history accompanied by urgent desires to express—and claim—those concerns through public art” (Doss 2014, 41). The art in question are monuments of a generally critical nature regarding shameful events in American history. This is part of a
larger movement to counteract “historical amnesia,” as well as the narrative of an innocent and blameless America.

According to Doss, memorials are no longer established to remember but used to assert “citizens’ rights and persistent demands of representation and respect, and the manipulation of grief and the appeal to emotion” (Doss 2011, 116). Because memorialization can be a way of adding meaning to a place, memorials and the narratives behind them must be questioned. Memorial projects should be composed of an “ethically, socially, and politically beneficial” use of feelings of mourning or loss (Doss 2011, 113).

Doss focuses on the many ways that memorials reinforce the marginalization of groups and their histories. She focuses on recontextualization in favor of Indigenous American groups as well, particularly concerning monuments to Christopher Columbus. In *Memorial Mania*, Doss supplies a 1989 quote from Oglala Lakota activist Russell Means who says “we don’t want to destroy this monument to the Columbus legacy. We only want to add to it. The truth. The true Columbus” (Means quoted in Doss 2010, 323). Means is referencing a monument that also stood near the capitol in Denver, Colorado until one day after the Denver Civil War Monument came down in June 2020, when protestors tore it down (Tabachnik 2020b). He also seems to express the same views as those involved in the activism surrounding the Civil War Monument who asked that Sand Creek not be removed from the list of battles on the monument, and instead, requested further context.

In Doss’s article, “Public Art, Public Response: Negotiating Civic Shame in Duluth, Minnesota” (2014), the monument addressed is The Clayton Jackson McGhie
Memorial. It is a tribute to three African American men who were falsely accused of assaulting a White woman and were subsequently lynched by a mob ten thousand people strong. Doss concludes that the memorial is an example of restorative justice in art. Her analysis of monuments across the American landscape and how memorialization of an event affects social consciousness parallels my case study of the Civil War Monument at the capitol building in Denver, Colorado.

In Steven Dubin’s article, “In Civil(-ized) Places: ‘Culture Wars’ in Comparative Perspective” (2008), he examines how culture wars play out in museums, monuments, and heritage sites. Dubin defines culture wars as

impassioned confrontations between groups of the same society, polarized over so-called hot-button issues falling broadly within the realms of race and ethnicity; the body, sexuality, and sexual orientation; identity politics; religion; and patriotism and national identity (Dubin 2008, 477).

According to Dubin, monuments and heritage sites are where memory and meaning are created, social representation is constructed, and where public knowledge is produced (Dubin 2008, 478). Custodians and stakeholders of these sites continue to seek a balance, but Dubin argues that the very nature of museums, monuments, and heritage sites will cause them to continue to be sites of conflict.

Ari Kelman’s book, A Misplaced Massacre, was a foundation source for my research. In this book, Kelman recounts the search for the exact location where the Sand Creek Massacre took place to establish the Sand Creek Massacre National Historic Site in 2007. The historical background on the massacre, as well as other representations of the event in monuments, are woven into his narrative of the historic site. This includes,
among others, the Denver Civil War Monument. Kelman’s choice of writing style reflects how tangled the past and present are in the research process.

**The Anthropology of Memory**

The anthropological literature on memory is for the most part relatively recent, despite the humanities discussing it for much longer. An older work, which is increasingly cited by today’s anthropologists, is Maurice Halbwachs *La Mémoire collective* (1950). Halbwachs was one of the first to “shift the discourse concerning collective knowledge out of a biological framework and into a cultural one” (Assmann 1995, 125). The French Philosopher and Sociologist coined the term “Collective Memory,” which he defined as memory that is shared by a community or faction and is more than just a memory in any single member of that group. These group memories often result in historical distortion for its members (Berliner 2005, 207).

Since then, anthropology has experienced a boom in memory studies, which began in the 1980s and continues today. The leader of the memory boom was the Popular Memory Group at the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) at the University of Birmingham in England. The topic was so uncharted that they admitted not knowing if the topic of “popular memory,” or “being historians of the present,” should be pursued as an additional way of writing about history, or should be urged as an alternative to conventional historiography, or is indeed a perspective that should inform all historical practice (CCCS Popular Memory Group 1982, 1). While the group’s initial work was not readily accepted in England, its research directed the field’s scope and focus on the “nature and processes of remembering as much as the contents of the memories…” (Thomson, Frisch, and Hamilton 1994, 34)
The seminal works by Paul Connerton’s *How Societies Remember* (1989) and Pierre Nora’s *Rethinking France* (2001). Connerton specifies two principles, crucial to the framework of this research. The first is “our experience of the present very largely depends on our knowledge of the past” (Connerton 1989, 2). The past, which makes connections with the present, will shape how the past is perceived. Connerton’s second assertion is “that images of the past commonly legitimate a present social order” (Connerton 1989, 3). Connerton asserts that if two people in the same group do not have the same past, they cannot share beliefs or experiences. Initially, this point may seem oversimplified, but Connerton is largely referring to people having identical paths and motivations to arrive at a specific belief or to view an experience through the same lens. This reinforces how essential heritage manipulation is to a community that wants its citizens united behind one history.

*Rethinking France: Les Lieux de Mémoire, or Realms of Memory*, in English, analyzes the way national identity in France began to evolve in the 1970s after the death of former President, Charles de Gaulle. During his life, the narrative of French history, and by extension French identity, was defined by events like the French Revolution, thought to be a great innovation. Another point of French pride during this period was the resistance against the German occupation of France led by de Gaulle during the Second World War. His death, though not the only contributing factor, caused a “resurgence of everything that had been repressed from national sentiment (the Terror during the Revolution to torture during the Algerian War) and by a crisis in all the aspects of the formation of national character” (Nora 2001, xv). Nora organized a vast anthology in the
multiple volumes of *Rethinking France*, which explores the material heritage of France and its history through memory. Through this exploration, Nora coins the phrase Les Lieux de Mémoire, defined as “the specific role that memory played in the construction of the French idea of the nation and in part from recent changes in the attitude of the French toward their national past” (Nora 2001, xvi). This recounting of the French rediscovering their difficult heritage and bringing it to the fore to redefine themselves is like the current situation in the United States concerning monuments and regional and national identity.

In *Social Memory and History: Anthropological Perspectives* (2002), Jacob J. Climo and Maria G. Cattell effectively summarize why memory is both the friend and the enemy of monument recontextualization. “Social, collective, historical memory is provisional, malleable, contingent. It can be negotiated and contested; forgotten, suppressed, or recovered; revised, invented, or reinvented” (Climo and Cattell 2002, 5). The background on original monument designs and need for revisions in the present, such as those related to the Denver Civil War Monument, can be identified through the Anthropology of Memory, particularly social memory or collective memory.

Jeanette Rodriguez and Ted Fortier’s *Cultural Memory: Resistance, Faith, and Identity* (2007), draws parallels between historical memory and cultural memory, which are two forces heavily at play in this research. Rodriguez and Fortier write,

> History is constructed partially from the accounts of witnesses and partially from primary documents that reveal the memories of those involved in the events. We insist, however, that historical memory is a reconstruction of culturally relative ‘facts’ that is always influenced by particular worldviews (Rodriguez and Fortier 2007, 11).
This flexible subjectivity of any type of memory can be helpful to those who advocate to include multiple perspectives in our history, but societal ideas are often the reason those perspectives were disregarded in the first place. As stated by Climo and Cattell, memory is both a cultural process and a historical artifact (Climo and Cattell 2002, 12). This research yielded information on how the functionality of memory can be used in cases of recontextualization for inclusivity.

Arjun Appadurai’s influential concept of the “social life of things” and Igor Kopytoff’s idea of the “cultural biographies of objects” also contributed to my theoretical framework. The idea that things have social lives and biographies accentuates how the meaning and value of objects change as they move through different contexts. As such, Appadurai suggests one should “follow the things” to find their meaning. An object’s significance is encoded into it by the humans who interact with it, and its significance can be discovered in the different uses and forms it takes. “It is only through the analysis of these trajectories that we can interpret the human transactions and calculations that enliven things from a methodological point of view, it is the things-in-motion that illuminate their human and social context” (Appadurai 1986, 5). According to Appadurai, the object’s meaning evolves as the object is transferred between owners and moves through different contexts or “regimes of value.” The object at the center of this research, the Civil War Monument, stood still for over a hundred years while the societal morals and standards of the world around it evolved. This evolution continued until the monument could no longer fit into its current societal context where it stood, and “On Guard,” its bronze soldier statue, was pulled down by protestors. Now, the statue has a
new life in its context as a museum object. In a museum, this object loses its teeth, for the most part, transforming from a government-sponsored symbol of the state of Colorado to a relic of the past, like the other objects in the museum. Regardless of what further action is taken, the context of the Denver Civil War Monument would be modified. This includes the addition of any object taking the place of “On Guard,” including the original statue, if it were restored (Goodland 2021).

The cycle of ideology creating reality is a relevant concept to social reconstructivism. Like false consciousness, which is also attributed to Marx, ideology’s effect on reality keeps individuals from seeing the true nature of the world (Pines 1993). Regarding this research, ideology turns an all-out massacre into merely a battle. It caused a populace to consider those that carried out that massacre to be war heroes who, some fifty years later, were deemed worthy of a celebratory monument outside the state capitol. Ideology is what made a monument a worthwhile project in the beginning, and presently ideology pushes for more context and critical revision of the American past.
Chapter Four Research Design, Methods, and Findings

Research Questions and Goals

This research project consisted of a case study that investigated the Civil War Monument on the grounds of the Colorado State Capitol, including analysis of the path it has taken and continues to take. This includes a recounting of the history of the Sand Creek Massacre, the monument’s erection, the controversy surrounding it, and the activism and legislation leading to its reinterpretation, relocation, and reinterpretation. The research was guided by the following questions:

1. How does memory affect memorialization?
2. What have been the strengths and weaknesses of efforts to recontextualize with groups affected at the center?
3. What can the Denver Civil War Monument teach us specifically regarding updating and recontextualizing contentious monuments?

There were two components to my research design. The first phase took place in libraries and with primary source materials from the Colorado state legislative records.
and the Sand Creek National Historic Site Collection. In addition to research on other
reinterpreted monuments and the anthropology of memory, I obtained and analyzed
government documents and newspapers from the early 1900s, when the Civil War
Monument was erected, to more recent documents involving the completion of additions
to the monument. I identified sources referencing the monument in Colorado newspapers,
as well as a sample of significant articles about the Sand Creek Massacre itself and those
involved, such as Colonel Chivington. Documents from the Colorado government were
particularly helpful in my research, since they offer more insight than the public usually
has access to on the successful legislative moves made toward additional context,
misssteps in the quest for change, and the perspectives on each side of the debate.

To gain some sense of public opinion, I recorded responses to a temporary
informal survey in the Colorado Stories exhibit at History Colorado Center in Denver,
Colorado. The survey remained posted from August to December of 2017. On November
3rd, I photographed the responses, I later transcribed and coded them for analysis. In
interpreting these answers, to eliminate my own bias and interpretation, I only
categorized a response if the answer was explicit. Responses, with or without explicit
answers, were inspected for themes, which were slightly more interpretive. Responses
without an explicit answer or theme were coded as “other.” Some chose more than one
answer. While coding those cases, their answers were divided between their selected
choices (ex: two answers gave half a vote to each to total one vote). If a fraction of a vote
was in the final tally for a category, that number was rounded up based on the tens place.
Some of the archival data samples included in this research came from internet databases, such as Colorado’s Historic Newspaper Collection Database. I also utilized documents requested from the Colorado State Legislature and at the Sand Creek National Historic Site Collection. Many, but not all, of the applicable sources had been previously digitized.

I included samples of two different populations for my research. My first sample for this study included statements from Colorado officials, such as legislators, who had been involved with the monument recontextualization. Those on the Capital Development Committee and the memorial organization effort are a more specific subset of this group. This population sample, including the late David Halaas, a former Colorado State Historian and leader in preserving the Sand Creek Massacre Site, and others, brings light to the inner government workings related to this project. When discussing the topic of including more voices in American history, it is counterproductive to discuss it with legislators while avoiding those voices fighting to be included. I located statements (Appendix A and B) from members of the Cheyenne and Arapaho Nations, particularly those involved in the activism surrounding the monument, like Chief Laird Cometsevah, a descendant of the Sand Creek Massacre and representative of the Cheyenne and Arapaho Nations. These statements were submitted in 1998 to the Capitol Building Advisory Committee and are kept in files at the Colorado Capitol. Ever since the atrocities were committed against their ancestors, members of these tribes have been involved in activism for equality and recognition, including the additions to the Civil War Monument at the Colorado State Capitol. This sample, including those involved in the
initial push for the 1998 and 1999 Colorado Senate Joint Resolutions, is a population whose perspective was extremely valuable, especially for this research.

**Limitations**

Though monument recontextualization may seem unimportant to some, the monument in this study involves the Sand Creek Massacre. It represents an event that is a dark part of American history and, despite the passing of time, the wounds and sorrow it caused are still felt today. Discussing such a tragic event must be handled delicately, especially considering the general trauma Cheyenne and Arapaho and other Indigenous people have experienced. For these reasons, my research is structured with a considerable amount of deference in this respect.

Another limitation I experienced involves the nature of using archival sources to gain perspective on an event. Sometimes the only records are someone's interpretation rather than the actual first-hand documents. This is an issue particularly because I aimed to acknowledge the voices of those who were, and for the most part continue to be, passed over in historical accounts and who are not represented by monuments. I had to discern which sources of the tribal perspective to use. I attempted to only use first-hand accounts of Indigenous populations whenever possible. Indigenous Americans who were contemporaries of the Sand Creek Massacre were less likely to be recorded accurately, if at all. In these cases, I chose those recorded by White people who today’s historians generally agree did not allow their perspective to color their accounts and are trustworthy sources.
Finally, the bulk of this project was written during the COVID-19 pandemic. This resulted in limitations on my original plans for research. Originally, I was going to include interviews with people involved in Tribal and Colorado State governments as well as interviews with individuals to gain a sense of public opinion. As the pandemic intensified, offices were not as well staffed and individuals were harder to connect with. Available resources through libraries and archives were also extremely restricted. Interviews with the public were also more difficult to obtain due to the risk of illness. In the finished product, I used surveys taken by History Colorado Center in place of face-to-face research to gain a sense of public opinion and information given in others’ interviews.

**Positionality**

Regarding my demographic background, I am a White female in my early 30’s at the time of this study. I was born in Southern California and moved to the Saint Louis area at age 9. I grew up in an upper-middle-class family. I completed my undergraduate work at a private university near Charleston, South Carolina. My graduate degree will also be from a private university. While I have good foundational knowledge about the places I have lived, I only began to delve deep into Colorado history when I moved to the state for my graduate education a couple of years ago.

I believe my positionality is balanced by my current social and political beliefs. While I come from a privileged background, I am an advocate for individuals who are experiencing marginalization. I also believe that, in this advocacy, my voice and opinions are not the ones that should be prioritized, and I should use my privilege to lift their
voices. Because of this, there may be bias present in my sources as I more often sought the opinions of tribal populations seeking inclusivity rather than those who denounced expanding involvement.

**Use of Terms**

Throughout this thesis, I use “Indigenous American” as a preferred term when a specific tribe cannot be named. I came to this term through Indigenous American publications and information on the website for the Smithsonian’s National Museum for the American Indian. The Smithsonian’s states that,

> whenever possible, Native people prefer to be called by their specific tribal name. In the United States, Native American has been widely used but is falling out of favor with some groups, and the terms American Indian or Indigenous American are preferred by many Native people (National Museum of the American Indian 2021).

In 1999, Michael Yellow Bird, a professor of sociology and descendant of the Mandan, Hidatsa, and Arikara tribes of North Dakota, published an article in *American Indian Quarterly*, which critically analyzed the merits of different terms used to describe those with sovereignty over America before the arrival of European colonizers. Throughout the article, he keeps coming back to the phrase “Indigenous People” (Yellowbird 1999).

Indigenous people exist all over the world, however, so “Indigenous Americans” clarifies which populations are being described.

When it appears in this text, the term “American Indian” is used as the proper name for the war that occurred between Indigenous Americans and White settlers. It is also used in the proper name for American Indian Federal Policies, as well as in the
American Indian Movement, the name of an activist initiative from the 1960s and 1970s.
The term “Native American” is limited to its use in direct quotes.

The term “Indian” only appears in this thesis in quotations and historic job titles.
The term is controversial, with older generations sometimes preferring it. The Native Times published an article in 2015 objecting to the term “Native American” stating that the term was coined by White media and was not how Indigenous Americans self-identified. For example, the activist Russell Means always identified as American Indian, believing it was equivalent to other terms like Mexican American or African American.
The article quotes an elderly Lakota man from the Standing Rock Sioux Reservation [who] said recently, “If some Indians want to be called Native Americans or Natives, let them be called that, but I was born an Indian and I shall die an Indian” (Native Sun News Editorial Board 2015). All these terms are heavily debated by groups with varying positionality.

Memory and Memorialization

The way humans remember varies widely from culture to culture, or even from person to person. Memory is a complicated process that can be influenced by both external and internal factors. This adds uncertainty to any individuals’ account of an event. Because memory is easily influenced, those in positions of power in societal systems can manipulate the narrative to suit their purposes, like falsely claiming sinister motives to the actions of their political opponents or whitewashing their own negative deeds. Ultimately, the power of memory can have a positive effect when in the hands of
those who are compassionate and attentive to the needs of marginalized communities, as well as the larger communities around them.

All these factors come together to create the landscape of human memorials and monuments. In them is the potential for a greater understanding of the thought process behind the piece when it was erected and the strengths and weaknesses of that thinking. There is also the opportunity to rethink the message and recraft it to better represent community goals and ethical standards of the present. In the case of the Denver Civil War Monument, recontextualizing it and erecting additional memorials concerning the Sand Creek Massacre could further improve the relationship between the Colorado state government and tribal governments, particularly the Cheyenne and Arapaho who were directly affected by the massacre. Thoughtful reconsideration of the way the event was remembered could also express continued remorse for past atrocities and give ample reason for continued trust in current government-tribal relationships.

An individual's memory, particularly about themselves, greatly shapes their worldview. Liliane Weissberg, who specializes in literature and psychoanalytic theory, uses the example of novels written in the 1800s, like those by Dickens or Tolstoy, to illustrate this point, writing,

The story of individuals was constructed within a larger historical setting and driven by the memory of past events. Thus, memory became a crucial tool and agent for insisting on the hero’s (or author’s) identity and his (or her) place in the world (Ben-Amos 1999, 10).

If memory and identity are inextricably linked, groups who are wrongly vilified or completely forgotten by a dominant historical narrative are at a disadvantage, even when it comes to knowing themselves.
An individual's memory of an event may differ from reality for many reasons. These alterations happen to such a large degree that finding absolute truth may be impossible. Because everything is filtered through our senses, as well as existing biases or thoughts, “The output of human memory often differs-- sometimes substantially-- from the input” (Climo and Cattell 2002, 13). Internally, emotions and memory are so completely intertwined that our recollections can be considerably reshaped in the remembering or fabricated completely. The way a memory is shared between people can also change how something is remembered.

Experiences and the memories they become are also filtered through one's own prejudices, biases, previous experiences, and emotions held at the time they are recorded. This is usually helpful in the big picture of a human life, as it helps the mind generalize, prioritize, and decide. However, when the goal is accurate historic recall of an event, the mind’s search for patterns to make sense of the world's chaos can be detrimental.

Much of what cognitive psychology labels as memory distortion stems, in one way or another, from the mind's tendency to transfer or conflate, assimilating detail that has its origins in one experiential context into the memory of another… or combining detail drawn from different contexts into synthetic ‘memories’ of events that never actually happened…(Cubitt 2007, 83-84).

Mixing up similar specific memories is called repisotic memory and, while it complicates past narratives for some, others, like historians and anthropologists, have begun to embrace it to learn more about how approaches and demands in one’s current society can alter the symbolic idea of the past or perpetuate one's sense of self. For better or for worse, these inaccuracies impact the message of a particular monument.
It is not only the initial recording of a memory that can cause flaws in the memory’s accuracy. Each time a memory is summoned and remembered; distortion will likely occur. Per Climo and Cattell, “experiences are subject to misperceptions and interpretation as they are encoded and stored. Further loss and distortion occur with retrieval and reinterpretation, no matter how vivid the experience and later recall of it” (Climo and Cattell 2002, 14). This is mostly due to the same reasons that changed the memory initially. Remembering is often recolored by one’s current positionality, thus memories are constantly changing in the light of new life perspectives. Nostalgia is fed by this process, making the past more attractive than it was when it was the present.

The complexity only increases when trying to evaluate social memory, as should be done when erecting monuments or recontextualizing existing pieces. Quite a few of those studying memory in the fields of history, anthropology, and sociology believe that individual memory does not exist. Maurice Halbwachs, whose ideas were heavily influenced by his colleague Emil Durkheim, “insists on the social constructedness of any memory. People acquire or construct memory not as isolated individuals but as members of a society, and they recall their memories in society” (Ben-Amos 1999, 13). If we assume this to be true, then what is remembered and what is forgotten is cultural, likely serving the dominant narrative or fulfilling a current need. Social memory is fluid and constantly changing.

For an example of social memory affecting the dominant historical narrative one only needs to look at the surge in memorialization which occurred around the turn of the century, which includes the Denver Civil War monument. This movement, according to
those well versed in social memory, has been referred to as “the invention of tradition,” which is:

the way that societies create historical narratives or rituals to suit contemporary political or cultural conditions. Invented traditions are often crafted to maintain power relations and uphold the status quo. In the case of turn-of-the-century Civil War commemorative activity, communities were dealing with anxiety over massive changes facing the United States: industrialization, urbanization, and, among others, immigration. Nostalgia reigned, consequently, as Americans idealized the Civil War generation for its virtues and sacrifice. The monuments that cropped up were designed to inspire onlookers to venerate a shared iteration of the past and to embrace a reconciliationist narrative of war. (Kelman 2013, 73).

Therefore, although Civil War monuments from this period are more manipulated and manufactured history than fact, they stood as the dominant narrative for essentially a century.

In short, “Memory is not a dead letter file,” says Archibald,

Memory is intimately and intricately connected to senses. Through our senses, our brain makes a working map of the world, a story that explains the world in usable terms. Our bodies, our brains, and our memories seek to create a dream, a myth, a map that allows us to survive and to function in our world (Archibald 1999, 28).

It may be unreliable at reproducing exact truth, but, from the right perspective, it can give posterity insight about the hopes, fears, values, and general mindset of a group of people.

The power of a place to hold the memory of great or terrible events is irrefutable if the memory is strong enough. “Place is a powerful stimulus to memory” (Archibald 1999, 26). From wooden crosses by the roadside to memorialize someone who has died, to full stone monuments and designated historic sites with visitors’ centers and interpretive walking trails, like the Sand Creek National Historic Site, a place which a group of people feel connected to “stores shared memory, the very raw materials of community” (Archibald 1999, 35). Even if a specific place is not a place of memory, in
building a monument on an average piece of land that has been set aside, it becomes host to memory and the “almost sacred purpose of monuments” (Danzer 1987, 2).

A force in the human mind, which is almost as powerful as the hold of a certain place, is the power to “un-remember” places that no longer serve us.

Specific places support continuity of memory and history as they become invested with meaning for specific individuals and groups, though such meanings may be contested within groups or between competing groups. And places can be ‘un-remembered’ as when buildings or other landmarks are demolished and can no longer support the memories and meanings stored in them (Climo and Cattell 2002, 21).

Un-remembering can happen gradually and accidentally over time, like a vacant storefront whose function has been forgotten. It can also happen all at once, as with the removal of confederate monuments in the United States in the 2010s and 2020s. The desire to emphasize a different historical narrative required actively un-remembering the previous narrative celebrated. After removing the bronze and stone, the place, which, in most cases, is only significant as the site of a monument, cannot support those memories any longer. Eventually, the change in landscape will lead to people forgetting the words on the plaque and which version of history was represented, or, hopefully, the feeling of being unwelcome in their communities.

It is logical that an influential place, like Gettysburg battlefield or Auschwitz concentration camp, has so powerfully woven itself into a culture that would draw visitors who come and try to connect with their past and a piece of their identity. Halbwachs explains the cognitive science of this attachment:

Thus, every collective memory unfolds within a spatial framework. Now space is a reality that endures: since our impressions rush by, one after another, and leave nothing behind in the mind, we can understand how we recapture the past only by
understanding how it is, in effect, preserved by our physical surroundings. It is to space - the space we occupy, traverse, have continual access to, or can at any time reconstruct in thought and imagination - that we must turn our attention. Our thought must focus on it if this or that category of remembrances is to reappear (Halbwachs 1980, 140).

The place itself is not what is special, it is the collective memory of the place that endures in the minds of people and it can be remembered, forgotten, and rediscovered.

Memory is so easily manipulated that it can be used negatively in the wrong hands. “For it is surely the case that control of a society's memory largely conditions the hierarchy of power” (Connerton 1989, 1). When envisioning this kind of exploitation of memory, one might imagine something evil and Orwellian, but it could be much more commonplace than what is found in a dystopian novel. It can be as simple as one group's version of history being privileged over another’s. “Political elites and others in positions of power try to be ‘the masters of memory and forgetfulness’ (LeGoff 1992) because to control memory is to control history and its interpretations of the past” (Climo and Cattell 2002, 30).

In the case of Indigenous Americans, European colonizers dismissed their histories, by deeming written history more reputable than oral. Gail Ridgely, a member of the Northern Arapaho, a representative to the Sand Creek Massacre site, and a descendant of the atrocity reflects on the irony of the historical record filled with obvious prejudice, Our tribal stories are frequently discredited by Western historians as merely myth. I have always found this fascinating; an entire body of knowledge can be dismissed because it was not written, while written material by obviously biased men is readily accepted as reality (Ridgely, SmithsonianNMAI, 2014a).

Even when someone’s account has been determined to be false in court, like Chivington’s report on Sand Creek, it still becomes the common belief, the narrative the public
remembers and, to paraphrase Ari Kelman, the story which is rendered in bronze. This is an example of “the powerful use of ‘forced forgetting’...to silence or displace memories inimical to their projects, replacing them with the history of their own choosing or invention” (Hobsbawn and Ranger 1983).

American tribal populations were not the only victims of this manipulation of memory and its reflection in the historical record. Enslaved African Americans were similarly dismissed, even when their narrative was written.

[I]n the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, white Southerners in the United States depicted a benign view of slavery with honorable masters and contented slaves-- a view that, because it was the public memory, effectively silenced ‘alternative memories of violence, exploitation, and cruelty’ (Brundage 2000, 7).

Openness to accepting and learning about the lived experiences of African Americans and their enslaved ancestors came about around the time of the modern Civil Rights Movement, roughly the same time as interest in the perspectives of Indigenous Americans became increasingly mainstream. “African Americans’ counter-memory--kept out of sight of whites-- was largely ignored by whites until the 1960s, when Blacks had enough political power to insist on a more inclusive history” (Climo and Cattell 2002, 28). The myth that slavery in America was anything other than an inherently violent practice and the institution, has been detrimental to social memory and continues to cause problems for not only African American populations in the South, but the political climate across the country as well.

While memory does have drawbacks as previously discussed, it is possible to use it as a force for catharsis and healing. These emotions are essential and “...it is incorrect
to talk about emotion and reason as if they are separate ways of thinking. Emotion is at the very center of human rationality, not distinct from it” (Archibald 1999, 22-23). With a focus on reinterpretation of monuments that are associated with painful events and the recontextualizing of those monuments, the memories which are distressing to those who carry them can be made into a force for good if they are used to correct parts of the dominant narrative. “Narrative memories of everyday experience are always reconstructed and frequently distorted, whereas traumatic memories are likely to preserve exact details…” (Climo and Cattell 2002, 14). Many Indigenous American cultures are more likely to pass information down through storytelling than writing, which can be a more emotional process for transferring memory to younger generations. The added effect of emotion may be beneficial in maintaining crucial detail. Intergenerational or historical trauma may make tribal oral histories a more reputable source for interpretation of painful events. “Restorative justice and reconciliation are often the express goals of memorials at places of pain and shame. But the concept and experience of ‘healing’ are far from straightforward or easily realized” (Colwell-Chanthaphonh 2010, 445).

Even if using memory this way is not easy, it serves the dual purpose of healing the community and having more accurate memorials and monuments. Some would argue that it is the duty of those who are able to apply history in a way that eases present suffering. “In the absence of empathy, emotion, concern, and caring, history becomes an exercise in nostalgia or an academic sidebar of limited use in the real world” (Archibald 1999, 22). Essentially, if it is not being used to better the lives of living individuals, there
is no practical reason for having a historical record. “[H]ow fiercely people will fight to chronicle their personal and collective experience in the face of an official history that has been falsified” (Paris 2001, 449). The struggle to correct the history of the victor has been a long one for marginalized communities, especially for Indigenous Americans. To ease that burden would show great compassion and remorse.

**Local Colorado Opinions**

![Figure 8: A display at History Colorado Center encourages museum visitors to voice their opinions on monuments on November 3, 2017. Photo credit: Sarah Davidson](image)

Just after the riots at Charlottesville, the debate about monuments came to the forefront. In the fall of 2017, the HCC, put up a discussion board that read:
History in the News

Confederate monuments have been in the news a lot in the last few days. One of History Colorado’s goals is to be a safe place for making sense of our past, present and future. Do you think Confederate monuments should stay, be taken down, be put into a museum with educational context or something else?

How can this museum-- the History Colorado Center-- help you and your family understand the issues surrounding Confederate monuments? What ideas do you have?

Next to the discussion board was a table with pencils and pads of sticky notes for visitors to voice their opinions on the subject. This discussion board was in one of the museum's core exhibitions titled “Colorado Stories,” which the HCC website describes as “a community-based suite of exhibits with media- and artifact-rich galleries exploring the many ways Coloradans have created community” (History Colorado Center 2020a).

While there is no demographic information associated with these responses, they do act as a kind of informal survey and provide some insight into the minds of Americans at the time, particularly those in Denver, a city where this debate is not a new one.

![Bar chart showing responses to the question: Do you think Confederate monuments should stay, be taken down, be put into a museum with educational context or something else? N= 61]
Of the 61 responses on the wall on November 3, 2017, the date of my data collection, 51 explicitly stated their opinion on what should generally be done with Confederate monuments. Of the submissions with explicit opinions, about 69% responded that statues should be removed and 31% wrote that they should be allowed to stay. Within these categories, some added further guidance. For instance, some write-in’s which did not support the removal of monuments, five of those qualified their response by saying that some sort of recontextualization should be implemented.

Respondents overwhelmingly chose the option to remove monuments and move them into museum settings. While this may be due to the wording of the question, as well as the setting it was posed in (a museum), most respondents believed that Confederate monuments should not be part of the cultural landscape in America any longer. In displaying something behind glass at a museum, an object's political or cultural power can be neutralized entirely, making it a museum artifact representing the past, rather than the present.

Whether those who participated in this informal survey gave a definitive answer to the question of what should be done about Confederate monuments, one or more of several recurrent themes were present in their responses. The most common theme was that the narrative of Confederate monuments no longer represents American society and celebrates the wrong individuals. One response read: “Move them into museums such as this one, include context-programming to educate people. Replace the monuments with ones that promote worthy values”. This person believes museums should house monuments and provide the accurate history surrounding them. They also believe new
monuments should be put up in their place to represent so-called “worthy values,” which implies the previous monument exemplified values that are not worthy.

Another theme was the urgency to deal with America’s difficult heritage. This point was often accompanied by comments on Germany’s removal of monuments related to Hitler and the Third Reich after the Second World War. One respondent to the question posed in the exhibit’s conversation space equated the Holocaust and Jim Crow laws, which enforced segregation in the Southern United States; “Post WWII the Germans removed all Nazi symbols and monuments and its [sic] not like they forgot the horrors of the Holocaust. They are Jim Crow era terrorism, and should be removed and destroyed. [heart]” (History Colorado Center 2020b). To many, priority should be placed on a restorative justice approach as well as a sense of responsibility to portray both the good and bad parts of the past.

Other themes included concerns about forgetting the past and how monuments are irrevocably tied to history; the importance of learning from past mistakes and concerns about the past repeating itself. As one visitor wrote:

“Our history must be preserved to learn from our past. These people made us what we are today. Learn!” While it is difficult to tell for certain, it appears this visitor believes monuments should be preserved and that it is possible to learn from the past on both individual and collective levels. These two themes tied for the third most mentioned in the responses I collected. In the 62 responses I collected, 8% were coded as “other” and did not contribute an answer to the core question or any of the common themes.
This conversation space in the 2020 “On Guard” exhibit is like the space I observed at History Colorado in the Fall of 2017. The sign in the space asks guests “Do we need monuments? What do you think their purpose should be?” (History Colorado Center 2020b). The sign hangs over a bench with pencils, sticky notes, and hand sanitizer. I collected the responses on the sticky notes this time using similar methods to those I used in 2017. Again, there were no demographics associated with the visitor answers. Of the 53 responses I collected on December 18, 2020, 41 had an explicit answer to the question posed by History Colorado. Surprisingly, over 5% responded “No” to the question “Do we need monuments?” and just over 11% qualified their “yes” response saying that additional monuments or context should be added to existing
monuments. The remaining 78% of responses were firm about monuments remaining a part of public spaces.

To provide additional perspective and give a more nuanced picture of these responses from Colorado, albeit based on a limited sample, I compared them with two Politico polls of approximately 1,990 registered voters, one from late 2017 and one from June of 2020. The latter poll was taken at the start of the Black Lives Matter protests. Just after the events in Charlottesville, VA in August of 2017, a poll asked whether statues of Confederate leaders should remain standing or be taken down. At that time, 52% of respondents believed the statues should remain standing, with 26% supporting their removal (Easley 2020). The 2020 poll showed an eight-point drop (44%) in support for allowing monuments to stay. The number of people who supported their removal jumped to 32%. This shows that while the movement to remove Confederate monuments remains generally unpopular with the entire electorate, it has gained momentum in the three years since the debate received increased attention. The discussion around monuments is trending toward reevaluating and countering their earlier narrative with an emphasis on restorative justice and healing.

**Recontextualizing other Monuments to Difficult Heritage**

More examples of this trend being applied to standing monuments are increasingly being reported by news sources. One example is the marker in Tallahatchie County, Mississippi, which shows where Emmett Till’s body was pulled from the Tallahatchie River. Till was an African American fourteen-year-old who was visiting Mississippi from Chicago in 1955 and made the mistake of speaking to a White woman.
For this offense, Till was murdered and thrown into the river. The two men responsible for his death were acquitted in court by an all-White jury, but confessed to the murder in an interview with *Look* magazine the next year. Emmett Till’s murder served as a catalyst for the American Civil Rights Movement.

Despite the great impact of these events, Emmett Till and the site where his body was found were without any sort of monument or marker for over fifty years. Once the marker went up, it was only a short time before it was vandalized and riddled with bullet holes. Between the years of 2008 and 2019, the sign was replaced four different times after being defaced or stolen. One of Till’s relatives, Airickca Gordon-Taylor, also the executive director at the Mamie Till Mobley Memorial Foundation, sees the bullet holes as an addition to the story, driving home its point: “My attitude over the years has been, leave it there with the riddled bullet holes in it, because it’s really indicative of the fact that racism is yet alive all over the country but especially down in Mississippi” (Epstein 2019).

However, the most recent replacement for the Emmett Till marker could put a stop to this damage. In October 2019, the sign is bulletproof, made from reinforced steel to prevent theft, and is monitored with surveillance cameras. The extra care and effort for this marker is equally apparent in the wording of the text, which acknowledges both the events involving Emmett Till and the history of enslaved people working on the land. No matter what the bullet holes added to the narrative, it is likely a weight off the minds of Till’s relatives to know that the site is well cared for. Gordon-Taylor also spoke about the significance of the place during the dedication of the most recent marker. “We walked
over and stood there for a few, and I had never been to the river there,” Gordon-Taylor said,

I saw the sign from the river site over the years. We have been to the location where Emmett’s body was tossed into the river but not where his body had been removed from the river. And so every time I stand there by the water, and I know that Emmett’s body was in there and floating in there. My mom grew up with Emmett, so imagine standing there with her (Epstein 2019).

It is clear in this quote that the place has power, not least for relatives of Emmett Till, but all those who recognize the progress made for so many people, sparked by his death, to come to pay their respects.

Acoma Pueblo, established in present-day New Mexico in 1150 C.E., is known as the oldest, continuously inhabited community in North America (Sky City Cultural Center 2020). It is also the site of colonial violence at the hands of Spanish conquistador, Juan de Oñate, who claimed the territory of New Mexico for Spain in 1598. His nephew, Juan de Zaldívar, came to the pueblo demanding food and shelter. When they were refused, they began to attack Acoma women and fighting broke out, leaving thirteen of the Spanish soldiers dead, including Juan de Zaldivar. When more returned for retribution, the result was the Acoma Massacre, in which an estimated eight hundred of the pueblo’s men, women, and children were killed. Five hundred more were taken prisoner and put on trial. Oñate decreed that males above the age of twenty-five were to have their right foot amputated and be forced into slavery. When the King heard about Oñate’s brutalities, he was banished from New Mexico and returned to Spain. Acoma people who survived the massacre and escaped the Spanish returned to the pueblo and rebuilt it, where it still exists today.
Despite atrocities and banishment, Oñate was regarded as a founder in New Mexico, with roads and schools bearing his name. The most noteworthy statue of Oñate, on horseback and cast in bronze, is in Alcalde, New Mexico. In late 1997, ahead of the four-hundred-year anniversary of Oñate’s founding of New Mexico, vandals removed the right foot of the statue. This publicity, in which many people learned for the first time the true legacy of Juan de Oñate, slowed plans for building an even larger monument in a less remote area. For two years, committees and debates were held. People identifying as Hispanic advocated for the monument to celebrate a figure they respect for civilizing the area while the Acoma people literally plead in city council chambers for their narrative not to be erased again. The extensive debate led to a displeasing compromise for both the Hispanic people and the Acoma people. Two installations were built to represent both cultures (Mars 2018).

When New Mexicans learned about the legacy of the disgraced conquistador and the suffering he inflicted on Indigenous people, they were experiencing the influence of power on memory. The primary source material which would give greater insight about Oñate, such as personal journals from those around him or himself, are lacking, if not altogether nonexistent. Because of this, Marc Simmons, one of Juan de Oñate’s biographers, admits that the information that has been preserved, such as official government records, “merely skim the surface of events. Oñate’s New Mexico notes to the king and viceroy, for example, clearly presented himself and his actions as he wished to be seen, not as things actually were” (Simmons 1991, xv). This sparse and obviously biased record casting Oñate as a hero and founding father of New Mexico was the readily
accepted narrative until the statute was altered in 1997. Even Conchita Lucero, a founding member of the New Mexican Hispanic Culture Preservation League and a proud descendant of a man on Oñate’s expedition, admits that the manipulation of memory by those in power can be detrimental to one’s psyche.

If we make you feel like the underdog, and then we take away your history and take away your knowledge, you’re starting from scratch. Conversations, you don’t even know how to participate. You just let the other guy put you down (Mars 2018).

Generations decide to frame history in a certain way, in this case, to favor the accounts of Spanish colonizers and all but forget the history of the Acoma people who were colonized. This has possibly led to individuals who did not know where they had come from. That fact could affect their ability to participate fully in the present and the future of their community, leaving their concerns underrepresented and being subject to the will of the majority.

Monuments and memorials that encourage healing are increasingly being erected across the country. An organization called the Equal Justice Initiative (EJI) opened the National Memorial for Peace and Justice in April of 2018, which memorializes thousands of victims of racial terror lynching’s which took place between 1877 and 1950. These murders “were violent and public acts of torture that traumatized black people throughout the country and were largely tolerated by state and federal officials” (EJI 2020).

The memorial is in a park-like setting in the middle of downtown Montgomery, Alabama. A center structure houses 805 hanging, metal, coffin-sized columns, which represent all the counties in which racial terror lynching’s took place. Initially, there were another 805 columns lying flat on the ground outside the center structure, but over time
these are meant to be taken by the corresponding counties to be displayed there, as a way of taking responsibility for more difficult aspects of their history. The landscape includes benches dedicated to people who fought for Civil Rights, as well as heart-wrenching bronze statues. One of the statues is a group of seven Africans, depicted in chains, in the midst of the Transatlantic Slave trade. An accompanying museum called The Legacy Museum: From Enslavement to Mass Incarceration, follows the history of slavery and racism in America (Holt 2018).

When the National Memorial for Peace and Justice opened, there was immense praise for it. The EJI has received accolades for approaching this project from a collaborative standpoint, working with many African American artists and community members. Another strength of this memorialization effort is the cohesive historical narrative that follows African American oppression from its inception to the present day. Not everyone saw the memorial as positive. There was considerable backlash from Montgomery’s White community members. One resident criticized the memorial saying “It’s going to cause an uproar and open old wounds. Local residents believe it’s a waste of money, a waste of space, and it’s bringing up bullshit” (Jacobs 2018). Still, in saying their names, mirroring a significant social movement started by Black Lives Matter, and being a reminder of the petty reasons, these humans lost their lives, it is undeniably a powerful use of memory for healing.
Chapter 5 Conclusion

Monuments, memorials, and sites which focus on difficult aspects of heritage tend to be a lightning rod for criticism from those who are used to seeing their history and identity easily in public. However, a choice by stewards of those sites to pursue restorative justice through participation and healing of the groups affected will lead to a stronger community which is supportive of their mission. If public pieces like these have more variety in their presentation and perspective, the landscape becomes enriched with a more diverse and complete history that supports the identities of more people.

These narratives are not optional and a well contemplated stance is essential. Neutral monuments are not an option as monuments and memorials will always have a perspective. Since monuments are inherently celebratory, they lift up whoever or whatever history they feature. Roadside memorials of silk flowers and children’s toys often remind drivers about the cost of drunk driving. Even something that may seem innocuous like “Spirit”, a statue of John Denver at the Colorado Music Hall of Fame at Red Rocks Amphitheater, takes the position of praise. Denver is depicted majestically with a guitar on his back and an eagle on his arm with its wings outstretched. If the
surrounding is also considered, the statue is displayed outside of a music venue and a hall of fame to which Denver was the first inductee in 2011 (Condon 2013). Even if the subject matter of a monument or memorial is not historical or political, the piece usually seeks to elevate the importance of the person or event to ensure it is not forgotten. This is not necessarily a negative quality; it only means that those who develop these pieces need to be cognizant of their message to all groups in their community.

Figure 10: John Evans’s headstone spray-painted with the word “colonizer” in Riverside Cemetery in Denver, CO on February 28, 2019. Photo credit: Sarah Davidson
Heritage monuments and sites across America which do not address and correct their whitewashed history are also attracting criticism from the public, being increasingly “called out” by individuals through in-person protests, social media, or other internet sites. In some cases, the citizenry has taken matters into their own hands and either damaged the site or contextualized it in their own way. For instance, sites associated with John Evans are often vandalized. Students, faculty, and community members in Evanston, Illinois have repeatedly asked that the name John Evans be removed from the names of campus buildings. However, their requests have also been repeatedly ignored by the Board of Trustees and the Northwestern University president. As reported in The Daily Northwestern in October of 2019, “Alumni and students found the phrases ‘F—k John Evans’ and ‘THIS LAND IS COLONIZED’ painted around The Rock on Saturday during Homecoming weekend” (Li 2019). As I argue in this thesis, if appropriate action is not taken to address issues of recontextualization, those in power, like lawmakers, must be aware of the potential monetary cost, as well as the cost of potentially irreparable relationships with marginalized groups and potentially irreplaceable artifacts.

Up to this point, the placement of the Sand Creek Massacre memorial given to the state of Colorado by the tribes in 2017 has been delayed due to disagreements about placement. The oral histories of the tribes say that when Chivington’s soldiers marched back to Denver after the massacre carrying their gory “trophies,” that parade ended at the area that would become the grounds on the west side of the Colorado Capitol. To pay respects to those who were murdered and had their body parts put on display, tribal representatives feel that this area would be the ideal location for the memorial. Colorado
state representatives have objected to this location based on issues like the symmetry of the capitol grounds. Because of this impasse, the conversation about the monument had stalled in recent years.

However, since the base on which the statue of the Civil War soldier once stood is now empty, Colorado and Tribal government officials are proposing that the newly freed up space should be used for the Sand Creek Massacre memorial. This is obviously happy news for many since plans for the creation of a new memorial have been in limbo for several years. While leaving “On Guard” in a museum setting is understandable, it could be joined with its pedestal in a military cemetery or some place with a similar intent. However, I believe this is an exciting opportunity to be creative with the Denver Civil War Monument and memorializing the Sand Creek Massacre.

In my opinion, the most intriguing choice is to leave the Denver Civil War Monument pedestal empty. During my research for this project, I discovered the existence of anti-monuments, also known as counter-monuments. These structures defy public expectation of what a memorial should be. For example, in 1998, Korean artist Do-Ho Suh created an empty pedestal that resembled the marble pedestal for a monument called “Public Figures”, but instead of a towering figure above the small Brooklyn park, the pillar is supported by tiny figures, just under a foot tall. Suh described the subversive meaning of the piece, saying:

I wanted to rethink this notion of the distant, elevated figure. I wanted the audience to be able to relate to the piece. These figures are where you can see them up close, and they’re just over a foot high; they are Caucasian, African, and Asian, male and female. Public Figures is almost an anti-monument; it brings the statue down from the pedestal (Suh 2004).
Suh’s anti-monument is part of a trend of empty pedestals which have begun to be incorporated in this idea recently. Author and professor Gregory Smithers has written about the significance of empty pedestals, saying that they are powerful symbols which allow us to see both the dark and light sides of our histories and “invitations to empathize with the perspectives of people previously marginalized from the interpretation of the past” (Smithers 2020). Perhaps the noticeable absence of a figure on the Denver Civil War Monument pedestal will help those observing the monument to identify with the feeling of loss felt by those harmed by the monument’s history and perspective. Smithers continues, quoting a colleague,

“As Edward Ayers, the Tucker-Boatwright Professor of Humanities at the University of Richmond told me, “What matters now is what we all do with what remains. We don’t have a blank slate or a clean sheet of paper on which to draw our plans, but history never does” (Smithers 2020)

This is the reason I believe the idea of the empty pedestal is so engaging. Instead of adding another narrative on to the Denver Civil War Monument, allow the layers of histories to shine through. Empty pedestals are not the norm and may also inspire curiosity in those who pass it. If the empty pedestal has a variety of high-quality interpretations from stakeholders nearby, it is possible the effort would receive more attention as well as inspire reflection. The ideal outcome, in my opinion, would be to repurpose at least the thousands of dollars saved by leaving the pedestal as-is and putting them into social programs and other systemic changes. These activities could be considered both reparations and an act of honoring and rememorializing the descendants of the Sand Creek Massacre in a meaningful way without occupying physical space.
Some figures in Colorado would disagree with any proposal for the Denver Civil War Monument that was not total restoration of it. For example, Dick Wadhams, former Colorado Republican state chairman, and political consultant, wrote an opinion piece for *The Denver Post* in December 2020. In the piece, Wadhams stated that he was against the Sand Creek Massacre memorial going up in the prominent and now empty spot where the Denver Civil War Monument once stood on the west side of the Colorado State Capitol. Wadhams believes such a space should be filled by the best of the state's history rather than one of its darkest, most regrettable events. He also argues that there should be a statewide conversation about what to do with the space;

This should be the challenge to the Capitol Building Advisory Committee and the state legislature. Step back and let our state have a thoughtful discussion about what that site should convey about the State of Colorado. Let’s honor our past and project our future while not letting the anarchists win (Wadhams 2020).

Wadhams suggestion is contradictory in that he introduced the idea of taking a democratic approach to the issue, but in the end, reinforced the system of majority rule. Ironically, this is what kept the Denver Civil War Monument on the western steps of the Colorado State Capitol for more than a century and stalled more than twenty years of debate with tribal governments about an appropriate location for a Sand Creek Massacre Memorial. Whatever the solution, healing should be prioritized.

The case study of the Denver Civil War Monument only shows one path monument recontextualization can take. Colorado officials took some progressive steps to right wrongs, but those steps obviously have not been completely successful. If they had been then the monument would not have been targeted by protestors with spray paint and eventually torn down. The way each community feels about its heritage and culture is
unique, and so the solutions should be appropriate to its history and social context. Those in charge of further recontextualization efforts should prioritize the views of stakeholders within their communities and the values and beliefs those communities aspire to. The social and political landscape in the United States is changing quickly. Monuments perpetuating harmful ideas like White supremacy are not the only reason for social unrest. They are just physical manifestations of the systemic racism that has plagued the United States since its founding. Symbols of systemic racism and injustice will continue to incur monetary and social costs and erode community trust in civil society if not attended to with sincerity.

My research has shown the ways memory has and will continue to influence the narrative of monuments and memorials. I have analyzed the strengths and weaknesses of other recontextualization projects at difficult heritage sites, particularly those that prioritized the perspectives of marginalized individuals and compared their success to those recontextualization efforts which did not seek more diverse opinions. Finally, I have recounted the most complete history of the Denver Civil War Monument that I could assemble as well as its possible trajectory as the city and state continue to seek the most appropriate ways to commemorate Colorado’s Civil War soldiers and to memorialize the victims of the Sand Creek Massacre either on the grounds of the state capitol or elsewhere. Comparing other recontextualization efforts to the journey of the Denver Civil War Monument could determine if its handling should be used as an example for other cases. Perhaps those responsible for the reinterpretation of the monument could also benefit from looking at approaches taken in other communities. My
research has shown that projects that include the participation and perspectives of diverse stakeholders tend to be more successful and provide a fuller historic narrative.

The search for truth is important, particularly to alleviate the political, economic, and other consequences for marginalized populations and the quest for absolute truth will always be an imperative for some. However, very often when someone is searching for the truth, what they are actually searching for is the meaning behind it. Even if a primary source cannot be used to determine fact, it is still beneficial because it tells the story of the person who holds the memory. In reviewing the responses left at the History Colorado Center, Richard Archibald’s view of balance seems most relevant,

Can we find a balance between emotional value-bearing memory and the white lab coat of history? Can we agree that facts matter as crucial reference points, but that memory, with its evocation of emotion and empathy, is the only sure path to the past? Can we stop demanding that memory be a surrogate for truth and acknowledge it as a faculty for defining meaning? Can we admit that despite memory’s historical fallibility, it nevertheless is an important determinant of the course of human events? (Climo and Cattell 2002, 70)

When considering tangible heritage, the emotions and memory surrounding a history and the relationships it encourages should be prioritized.

Author, documentary filmmaker, and traditional bead worker Cinnamon Kills First is Northern Cheyenne and a Sand Creek Massacre descendant. She spoke on the online Sand Creek Spiritual Healing panel in November 2020, which took the place of the annual Sand Creek Spiritual Healing Run during the COVID-19 pandemic. One of her most resonant thoughts feels relevant for mending generational trauma:

When we talk about healing, us Cheyenne’s, we gather, we tell stories, we see our strength, our resilience. We’re there, we say prayers, we sing, we cry, and we run. That running is a somatic release. We have all this rage built up. Our historical trauma is on the survivors’ side and every time we’re there and we run, and we
bless the earth with our feet, that brings healing to us. Historical trauma happens on both sides. On the White side, who are the people who enlisted for 100 days? The schoolteachers, the bankers, the common folk of Denver, of that area. And what did they do after the 100-day enlistment? They went back home. And, so, we can point fingers at Chivington and Evans, but I’m also super curious in identifying all the people who joined for 100 days and who carried our body parts home, all the families who hid our bones in their closets. That is white supremacy and that is unnamed. So, we have gone and done the work of telling this story...meeting every year...to celebrate our resilience and our strength and our...survivor hood. But when we talk about healing, I think it has to be on both sides, so what are all the White people doing? What are Evans’ descendants doing? What are the descendants of all those people who joined for 100 days to kill us...doing to heal? I mean, for me, for this entire country to heal it takes both sides to face that. We have survivor syndrome, there’s perpetrator syndrome. And when you don’t stop the perpetration, which is colonization that is ongoing. When you don’t stop the perpetration you cannot allow for a moment of healing to happen, right? So, there’s just a lot of work, I think, that needs to be done on the non-native side of history, on the perpetrators’ side of history that needs to stop the perpetration...This white supremacy is still alive and well and needs to be named and healing needs to be done on the white side, cause we’re doing our healing on the Native side (The Association on American Indian Affairs, 2020).

This Indigenous perspective establishes the objective of healing, which should guide non-native peoples in handling all systemic issues, not just those related to monuments and memorials.
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Appendix A

MEMORANDUM

To: Senate and House of Representatives of the State of Colorado

From: Steve Brady, President, Northern Cheyenne Sand Creek Descendants
       Laird Cometsevah, President, Southern Cheyenne Sand Creek Descendants


Date: July 25, 1998

As the authorized representatives of the Northern Cheyenne and Southern Cheyenne Sand Creek Descendants we strongly and gratefully support the efforts of the Colorado State Legislature to recognize the November 29, 1904, Sand Creek Massacre as a massacre and not a "battle" and as an act of genocide on a known peaceful village of Cheyenne Indians under the leadership of Chief Black Kettle.

However, we respectfully request that the words "SAND CREEK" presently engraved on the Civil War Memorial be retained.

Rather than erase the words "SAND CREEK" from the list of Battles and Engagements, we wish that interpretative signage be placed around the Civil War Memorial statue that would inform and educate the public about the holocaust of Sand Creek and its meaning to all peoples.

Our sincerest thanks and appreciation for your consideration.

Respectfully submitted,

Steve Brady
Laird Cometsevah
Appendix B

July 31, 1998

Karen D. Rogers
Executive Secretary
Colorado Commission on Indian Affairs
130 State Capitol
Denver, Co. 80223
Phone 303-866-3027
Fax 303-866-5469

Dear Ms. Rogers,

I received your letter on July 30, which did not leave me much time to respond. The Sand Creek Massacre Descendants Trust position on this matter is very simple. The mass murder of unarmed old men, women and children who were in the custody of the U.S. army does not signify a battle in any sense of the word.

In 1864 the political leadership of Colorado was motivated by a covetous desire for land. False crisis were created to manipulate public fear and prejudice into public hysteria to justify the planned atrocities to be committed on peaceful bands of Indians. John Chivington, a Methodist Preacher in command of the Colorado Volunteers and U.S. Troops, on November 29, 1864 invaded the sanctuary of the peaceful bands of Indians and indiscriminately attacked and mercilessly slaughtered and mutilated old men, women and children, in spite of the American flag, “indicating American protection”, and the white flag, “a symbol for surrender”, flying over their camp at Sand Creek Colorado.

We will not support any action that will tailor the actions of John Chivington, the Colorado Volunteers and U.S. Troops, to receive the same respect due to the many legitimate battles during the Civil War.

Sincerely,

Homer Flute,
Trustee